

**International Conference on Philosophy and Film**  
**eProceedings**

Edited by Susana Viegas and Maria Teresa Teixeira

*Volume 1, 2014*

## **eProceedings of the International Conference on Philosophy and Film**

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## FIGURES DU DEUIL. ROLAND BARTHES ET KRZYSZTOF KIESLOWSKI<sup>1</sup>

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La mort et l'agonie sont une question qui est depuis longtemps abordée dans les sciences humaines et dans la philosophie. Karl Jaspers considère l'acte de mourir comme une expérience des limites. Le monde humain n'est pas seulement un espace des grands, des valeureux et des éternels, il appartient aussi à ceux dont l'existence passe et se retrouve au seuil final qu'il faut traverser. Le caractère limitrophe de cette expérience inspire les cinéastes qui cherchent à apprivoiser ce phénomène irréductible et saisir son secret. En créant des images illusoires de la mort rendent plus proche sa réalité.

L'objectif de cette intervention sera la confrontation de l'image du deuil qui accompagne l'expérience de la mort dans *Bleu*, Kieslowski et dans le *Journal de deuil* de Roland Barthes. Dans la représentation visuelle et linguistique il est question du monde intime du désespoir après la perte des personnes aimées. Cette expérience est vécue comme une exclusion. Dans les deux œuvres on retrouve les mêmes attitudes, la même sensibilité et mélancolie.

Il s'agira dans mon texte de confronter l'expérience du deuil représentée par Barthes et par Kieslowski pour montrer comment les deux créateurs se confrontent avec la mort et le deuil à travers les paroles et les images.

Krzysztof Kieslowski et Roland Barthes : apparemment ils n'ont rien de commun. Le premier est séduit par la France, par sa métaphysique du quotidien, vue de la perspective de l'Europe de l'Est ; l'autre est un des plus connus intellectuels français, professeur au Collège de France, orphelin de père ayant des rapports très particuliers avec sa mère. Qu'est-ce qui peut unir ces deux personnages : les prédilections intellectuelles, l'observation attentive de la vie, ou la passion, aujourd'hui tant réprimée, pour les cigarettes ? Or, il me semble qu'ils peuvent être unis par l'intérêt pour la mort et pour le deuil.

La réflexion sur la mort et sur l'agonie tient une longue et riche tradition dans les sciences humaines. Les poètes, les artistes, les philosophes et les théologiens la pratiquent depuis l'origine des temps. Parmi les interprétations philosophiques il est à noter celle de Karl Jaspers qui

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<sup>1</sup> Cette article est une version corrigée et modifiée du texte qui a été publié en polonais : „Figury samotnej żałoby“ (Figures du deuil solitaire), *Zeszyty Naukowe Centrum Badań im. Edyty Stein: Wobec samotności* 12 (2014): 158-167.

reconnaît l'acte de mourir comme une expérience limite. L'univers humain n'est pas un espace des sujets intouchables, éternels, privés d'angoisse mais celui des êtres dont l'existence passe et se trouve au seuil inévitable de la mort qui est la fin inconditionnelle de chaque vie. Cette expérience-limite de chaque vie est source d'inspiration pour les cinéastes qui cherchent à l'appivoiser, à percer son secret. En créant l'illusion de la mort ils rendent plus proche sa présence.

L'intention de mon intervention est de confronter l'image du deuil et l'écriture du deuil qui accompagnent la mort dans *Bleu* de Kieslowski qui fait partie de sa trilogie *Trois Couleurs* et dans le *Journal de deuil* de Barthes. Dans ces deux cas du deuil, il est question du désespoir dû à la perte des personnes très proches, de l'état de l'exclusion et des images très différentes du travail du deuil. Dans *Bleu* et dans le *Journal de deuil*<sup>2</sup> il s'agit de la représentation d'un autre rythme de la vie étroitement lié à la mélancolie de la perte.

### **La figure classique du deuil**

Les recherches sur les réactions à l'égard de la mort et sur le deuil dans la culture semblent être une spécialité française. Philippe Ariès s'intéresse notamment au deuil et son absence dans la culture contemporaine, officielle et privée. La vie endolorie, c'est l'étymologie du mot français "deuil", se confronte dans la vie publique à la désapprobation et au refoulement. Il ne faut pas pleurer les morts, au moins il ne faut pas montrer les larmes. La culture contemporaine a produit une rupture dans le rapport à la mort. Dans le passé il fallait pleurer les morts et il fallait s'isoler pour faire le deuil dans la paix et dans le retrait. Aujourd'hui on stigmatise ce repli, on critique l'expression et la manifestation de la douleur. Marquée par l'hédonisme, la culture contemporaine a rejeté l'expérience et l'observation de la souffrance d'autrui. Ariès le commente ainsi :

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<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, *Journal de deuil* (Paris : Seuil, 2009).

Après des siècles du devoir et de la nécessité du deuil, spontané ou imposé, au milieu du XXe siècle on voit son interdiction. Au cours d'une génération la situation s'est invertie : ce qui était imposé dans le passé, aujourd'hui est interdit, et ce qui était alors interdit, est maintenant recommandé. Il ne convient pas de montrer sa douleur ni de montrer qu'on la ressent<sup>3</sup>.

Le silence face au deuil est devenu une norme culturelle, les coutumes qui facilitaient sa traversée ont perdu leur pouvoir. Considéré comme pathologie, le deuil a retrouvé sa place dans la psychanalyse de Freud qui est une source d'inspiration pour les continuateurs de sa pensée (pour Derrida le travail de deuil ignore les règles et le langage formaté, pour Lacan le deuil consiste à s'identifier avec la perte réelle, fragment après fragment). Dans son fameux texte « Deuil et mélancolie » Freud décrit le deuil comme une dépression douloureuse, manque d'intérêt pour le monde extérieur, dévalorisation de soi.

Après des siècles du devoir et de la nécessité du deuil, spontané ou imposé, au milieu du XXe siècle on voit son interdiction. Au cours d'une génération la situation s'est invertie : ce qui était imposé dans le passé, aujourd'hui est interdit, et ce qui était alors interdit, est maintenant recommandé. Il ne convient pas de montrer sa douleur ni de montrer qu'on la ressent<sup>4</sup>.

Cette réaction renverse radicalement l'ordre du monde qui est regardé à partir de ce moment comme stérile et vide. Le monde n'est plus intéressant, il ne divertit plus, il blesse ; il n'exalte pas, il ennue. Il n'est plus un espace d'attente, il est le lieu de résistance contre le changement et l'engagement. Il est le lieu où le sujet est appauvri, privé d'objet qu'on ne peut pas

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<sup>3</sup> Philippe Ariès, "La mort inversée Le changement des attitudes devant la mort dans les sociétés occidentales," *Archives Européennes de sociologie* 8 (1967): 169-95.

<sup>4</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Deuil et mélancolie," *Métapsychologie* (Paris : Gallimard 1986) 145.

recupérer, où il doit se reconstituer à travers le travail de deuil.

Le caractère universel de la mort et le caractère particulier du deuil sont donc un défi pour les visualisations et les narrations cinématographiques. Les deux expériences faisant appel à la rhétorique de la mémoire donnent au cinéma une possibilité d'explorer et de transgresser les limites de la sensibilité. Comme le dit Gilles Deleuze :

Entre les deux faces de l'absolu, entre les deux morts, mort du dedans ou passé, mort du dehors ou avenir, les nappes intérieures de mémoire et les couches extérieures de réalité vont se brasser, se prolonger, court-circuiter, former toute une vie mouvante, qui est à la fois celle du cosmos et du cerveau, et qui lancent des éclairs d'un pôle à l'autre<sup>5</sup>.

Le film a réalisé un des plus grands rêves humains, celui de saisir le temps, d'arrêter sa fuite, de pérenniser ses instants. L'événement unique contrairement à la photographie immobilisée peut être reproduit presque à l'infini sur la pellicule cinématographique. Le film fait une réplique de la réalité, de sa facture, de son caractère changeant. Le cinéma a donné l'opportunité de répéter et de multiplier les émotions qui paraissaient uniques et non reproductibles. Au cinéma l'homme se revoit lui-même et découvre que ses expériences sont aussi partagées par les autres. On pourrait se demander si cette présence du temps présent qui n'est pas consommé par le passé et qui ne programme pas l'avenir, n'est pas un sommeil mélancolique dont parle Roland Barthes :

Tout se passe comme si, avant même d'entrer dans la salle, les conditions classiques de l'hypnose étaient réunies : vide, désœuvrement, inemploi : ce n'est pas devant le film et par le film que l'on rêve ; c'est, sans le savoir, avant même d'en devenir le spectateur. (...) Suivant une métonymie vraie, le noir de la salle est préfiguré par la « rêverie crépusculaire » (...) qui précède ce noir et conduit le sujet, de rue en rue, d'affiche en affiche, à s'abîmer

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<sup>5</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 2. L'Image-temps* (Paris : Éd. de Minuit, 2009) 243.



finalement dans un cube obscur, anonyme, indifférent, où doit se produire ce festival d'affects qu'on appelle un film<sup>6</sup>.

Le cinéma est-il donc une forme de prison comme le deuil ? Immobilise-t-il dans temps, dans le présent qui se déroule au-delà du quotidien ? Comment l'image se débrouille-t-elle avec l'expérience du deuil et peut-on la dire ? La séance au cinéma est plutôt une des possibilités de comprendre les dilemmes de sa condition, comme le suggère Roland Barthes : « Sortant du cinéma, seul, ressassant mon problème amoureux, que le fil n'avait pu me faire oublier, j'ai ce cri bizarre : non pas : que ça cesse ! mais je veux comprendre (ce qui m'arrive) ! »<sup>7</sup>

### **Regarder le deuil**

Les critiques, les spécialistes du cinéma soulignent que les films de Kieslowski sont une représentation du deuil : la narration, la temporalité et les personnages sont marqués par la mort. Les images de Kieslowski, situées dans la rhétorique de la mélancolie. Comme le disait Barthes. Je chercherai donc à montrer l'analogie entre l'expérience de deuil dont parle Barthes et le traumatisme de la protagoniste de Kieslowski dans *Bleu*. Comment ces deux formes d'expressions se complètent-elles et comment elles expliquent la mort et la logique du deuil.

*Bleu* de Kieslowski faisant partie du cycle français suggère l'existence conçue comme une image dans laquelle est inscrite la conscience de sa propre mort imminente. Par sa vision du cinéma Kieslowski rejoint les conceptions de Deleuze pour qui le cinéma découvre et stimule le mental et le spirituel. A travers la médiation cinématographique qui est constamment soumise à une interprétation réinterprétation, le spectateur est provoqué à remettre en question sa vie. La vie, y compris celle dans le film, est une image dont la durée est entre la naissance et la mort, cette vie se montre comme une infinité des variantes et des scénarios possibles. Tenant compte

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<sup>6</sup> Roland Barthes, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (Paris : Seuil, 1977)104.

<sup>7</sup> Barthes, *Fragments* 72.

de ce principe de base, il convient de rappeler que le réalisateur déclarait à plusieurs reprises que chaque film est une narration sur une part de lui-même et que la caméra se focalise sur sa propre vie avec ses émotions, ses désirs, ses angoisses.

Dans le film de Kieslowski, le deuil est privé de tout caractère mimétique, il est seulement suggéré, ce qui fait de lui une expérience encore plus solitaire et vide. Le réalisateur lui enlève tous les accessoires, mais en même temps il le rend omniprésent à travers le froid bleu et les variations de l'ambiance. La couleur signalée dans le titre du film, signe de deuil, ouvre la voie à plusieurs interprétations, pourtant pour Kieslowski elle n'est pas arbitraire. Dans une des interviews il déclare :

Or, le bleu pour un portugais, c'est la couleur de l'espoir, pour un anglais et un américain *the blue* désigne la tristesse, pour les hindous, le bleu c'est l'espoir. (...) Les couleurs ont donc des significations qui varient selon les climats et les histoires des pays<sup>8</sup>.

Au lieu d'examiner ces jeux symboliques et culturels, je me pencherai vers l'analyse du bleu, de sa signification mélancolique. La intense des objets bleus dont la protagoniste du film est entouré suggère que le film de Kieslowski reste un film sur le deuil. La narration du film suit son rythme : Julie, une jeune femme de trente-trois ans, vit une tragédie, son mari et sa fille meurent dans un accident de voiture dont elle sort indemne. La belle et heureuse vie de Julie finit à cet instant. Elle reste seule, libérée tragiquement de ses proches, elle est forcée à traverser le deuil. Après le suicide manqué elle décide d'en finir avec son passé.

Le bleu qui accompagne Julie renforce le sentiment de séparation, de froid et de retrait. Julie est dans l'isolement et sans contact avec le monde. Sa situation pourrait se résumer dans les paroles de Julia Kristeva :

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<sup>8</sup> „Ponieważ są ciągle ci ludzie...”, *Kino Krzysztofa Kieślowskiego* (Kraków : Universitas, 1997): 292.

Une existence dévitalisée, en somme, qui, quoique parfois exaltée par l'effort que je fais pour la continuer, est prête à basculer à chaque instant à la mort. Mort vengeance ou mort délivrance, elle est désormais le seuil interne de mon accablement, le sens impossible de cette vie dont le fardeau me paraît à chaque instant intenable, hormis les moments où je me mobilise pour faire face au désastre. Je vis une mort vivante, chair coupée, saignante, cadavérisée, rythme ralenti ou suspendu, temps effacé ou boursoufflé, résorbé dans la peine<sup>9</sup>.

En adhérant à la narration de la « perte de l'être », Julie décide de refaire sa vie comme une personne anonyme. Elle rompt des liens avec ses amis et loue sous un faux nom un nouvel appartement. Elle rompt donc avec son passé, ses souvenirs, elle vit sans projets pour l'avenir ; elle ne fait absolument rien, comme l'avoue à l'agent immobilier. En s'isolant du monde la protagoniste refait son deuil. Elle se débarrasse des souvenirs, de la maison, des meubles, des photographies. Dans son radicalisme elle transgresse un des principes de deuil : Julie ne participe pas à l'enterrement, ne se rend pas au cimetière, ne verse pas de larmes. Elle ne regarde pas les photos et permet au collaborateur de son mari de prendre le dossier qui cache un secret conjugal. La solitude névrotique de Julie est conduit à la construction de la subjectivité libéré du poids du passé, Julie meurt pour le monde privé et public, elle se rend méconnaissable. Son rapport à la mémoire diffère de celui de Roland Barthes pour qui la photographie, trace du passé, est élément constructeur de son deuil.

Or, un soir novembre, peu de temps après la mort de ma mère, je rangeai des photos. Je n'espérais la « retrouver », je n'attendrais rien de « ces photographies d'un être, devant lesquelles on se rappelle moins bien qu'en se contentant de penser à lui ». Je savais bien que, par cette fatalité qui est l'un des traits les plus atroces de deuil, j'aurais beau

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<sup>9</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Soleil noir. Dépression et mélancolie* (Paris : Gallimard, 1987) 13-14.

consulter des images, je ne pourrais jamais plus me rappeler ses traits<sup>10</sup>.

La neurasthénie de Julie est l'effet de son radical oubli, de son rejet du passé, c'est par ce geste qu'elle cherche à se refaire. Cependant ces efforts se montrent vains, la protagoniste reste prisonnière de sa propre mémoire. Les fragments de musique de son mari (ou composée par elle-même) qui lui reviennent restituent le passé. La musique se fait un requiem et une hymne de joie, parce qu'elle permet d'élaborer le deuil, grâce auquel comme dit Freud « le moi se fait libre ». Les sons de la musique qui reviennent sont un personnage du film, ils empêchent le rejet du passé. La réécriture de la partition donne au protagoniste l'occasion de travailler la perte et d'affirmer la vie. Ceci se réalise dans la transmission de la maison et du nom à l'enfant de Sandrine dont l'existence elle avait appris des photographies qu'elle avait rejetées. La révolte, l'isolement, la solitude se montrent donc comme un long processus du deuil accompli. Les pleurs du protagoniste dans les dernières scènes du film confirment sa transformation : l'isolement cède lentement la place à l'acceptation du cycle naturel de la vie, à l'acceptation de la vie et de la mort.

### **Écrire le deuil**

A travers la rédaction de la partition qui est un testament à réaliser Julie ne retrouve pas le passé, sa vie reste marquée par un vide. Le film restitue cette mélancolie par la présence et la persistance des souvenirs auxquels la protagoniste cherche à échapper. La situation est complètement différente dans les écrits de Roland Barthes où le deuil est toujours en relation avec la mémoire qui est une prothèse de la présence. « La Photographie ne remémore pas le passé. (...) L'effet qu'elle produit sur moi n'est pas de restituer ce qui est aboli (par le temps, la distance), mais d'attester que cela que je vois, a bien été ». <sup>11</sup> Sœur aînée du cinéma, la photographie pour le sémioticien français un prétexte pour les souvenirs, une source de jouissance dont le témoin

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<sup>10</sup> Roland Barthes, *La chambre claire* (Paris : Seuil, 1980) 99.

<sup>11</sup> Barthes, *La chambre* 129.

comme dans le cas de Julie reste Paris :

Comme l'amour, le deuil frappe le monde, le mondain, d'irréalité, d'importunité. Je résiste au monde, je souffre de ce qu'il me demande, de sa demande. Le monde accroît ma tristesse, ma sécheresse, mon désarroi, mon irritation, etc. Le monde me déprime (le 18 mai 1978).<sup>12</sup>

Déjà dans son livre autobiographique, Barthes réclame de privilégier la forme de journal intime comme genre littéraire : « Sous l'alibi de la dissertation détruite, on en vient à la pratique régulière du fragment ; puis du fragment, on glisse au « journal ». Dès lors le but de tout ceci n'est-il pas de se donner le droit d'écrire un « journal » ? Ne suis-je pas fondé à considérer tout ce que j'ai écrit comme un effort clandestin et opiniâtre pour faire réapparaître un jour, librement, le thème du « journal » gidien ? A l'horizon terminal, peut-être tout simplement le texte initial (son tout première texte a eu pour objet le *Journal* de Gide)<sup>13</sup>. Ce livre publié en 1975 est tissé de fragments, de brèves études qui font plusieurs fois appel au problème de la perte mais ils ne résultent pas directement de son expérience. Le texte de Barthes est ici un manifeste littéraire, un je intellectuel dirigé vers le travail de la langue. C'est le *Journal de deuil* qui peut être reconnu comme un texte qui est un résultat d'une expérience authentique, d'un vécu.

Le journal de Barthes commence par une note : « Première nuit de noces. Mais première nuit de deuil ? »<sup>14</sup>, elle est rédigée le lendemain de la mort de Henriette Barthes. Cet événement ouvre une nouvelle étape dans la vie de l'auteur des *Mythologies*. Elle sera marquée, comme chez la protagoniste de Kieslowski, par la solitude, la mélancolie et le deuil dont il témoignera dans son *Journal* rédigé pendant deux ans. Les écrits rédigés dans cette période de la vie ont un

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<sup>12</sup> Barthes, *Journal* 137.

<sup>13</sup> Roland Barthes, *Par Roland Barthes* (Paris : Seuil, 1974) 99.

<sup>14</sup> Barthes, *Journal* 13.

caractère intime et sortent du cadre théorique, littéraire et philosophique. Son écriture se réfère toujours au deuil, elle devient un exercice nouveau de son existence. On peut observer que la question de la mort et le problème du deuil apparaissent déjà dans les travaux plus récents de Barthes. Le contexte est pourtant différent, même s'il était empreint de mélancolie. Le deuil, la perte, le chagrin sont ici seulement des états affectifs, des défis intellectuels que Barthes situait dans un autre horizon de ses analyses. Dans *Fragments de discours amoureux* il écrit :

Dans le deuil réel, c'est « épreuve de réalité » qui me montre que l'objet aimé a cessé d'exister. Dans le deuil amoureux, l'objet n'est ni mort, ni éloigné. C'est moi qui décide que son image doit mourir (et cette mort, j'irai peut-être jusqu'à la lui cacher. Tout le temps que durera ce deuil étrange, il me faudra donc subir deux malheurs contraires : souffrir de ce que l'autre soit présent (continuant, malgré lui, à me blesser) et m'attrister de ce qu'il soit mort (tel du moins que je l'aimais<sup>15</sup>).

Ainsi problématisé, le deuil ne résulte pas de l'expérience, ni de la perte de la personne aimée. C'est un discours théorique, séduisant et littéraire. Son contraire reste le *Journal de deuil*. Le deuil qui reste une expérience étrangère se traduit aussi par la forme de l'écriture. Les notes disparates, fragmentaires, ascétiques ressemblent aux haïkus japonais. Pourtant Barthes depuis longtemps cette forme de l'écriture, son livre autobiographique *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* est aussi rédigé de la même manière. A cette différence près que les notes rassemblées dans son *Journal de deuil* ne seront rédigées par lui-même, elles seront publiées par Nathalie Léger en 2009. Le travail de l'écriture est pour Barthes comme la composition pour Julie de Kieslowski : il s'agit à la fois de vivre de façon isolée et solitaire dans le monde et de maintenir le contact avec l'être perdu. Le deuil de Barthes n'est pas un événement, contrairement à sa description clinique il se transforme en durée. Contrairement à Julie, Barthes ne cherche pas à écrire une œuvre, il se concentre sur les fragments. Incapable d'écrire un roman, il construit des

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<sup>15</sup> Barthes, *Fragments* 124.

impressions en affirmant son impuissance : « Depuis la mort de mam. Plus envie de rien « construire » - sauf en écriture. Pourquoi ? Littérature = seule région de la Noblesse (comme l'était mam). (18 janvier 1979) »<sup>16</sup>. Rédigée à ce moment *La chambre claire* est aussi un effet du deuil. La photographie de la mère qui est le point de départ de la deuxième partie du livre revient aussi dans le *Journal* :

Ayant reçu hier la photo que j'avais fait reproduire de ma. Petite file dans le jardin d'hiver de Chennevières, j'essaye de la mettre devant moi, à ma table de travail. Mais c'est trop, cela m'est intolérable, me fait trop de peine (29 décembre 1978).<sup>17</sup>

Pratiquant la rhétorique de la séparation Barthes ne s'attend pas à un effet thérapeutique de l'écriture comme le pense Julie. Au contraire, l'intériorisation de l'expérience le rapproche avec la défunte. Il s'éloigne narcissiquement du monde vers le centre du deuil privé de médiation et de signes. Dans *Fragments de discours amoureux* Barthes notait : « L'idée en est légère : c'est une idée facile, simple, sorte d'algèbre rapide dont j'ai besoin à moment-là de mon discours ; je ne lui donne aucune consistance substantielle, ne prévois pas le lourd décor, les conséquences triviales de la mort : à peine sais-je comment je me suicidera »<sup>18</sup>. *Journal* est privé d'analyses pareilles. L'écriture, fragmentaire et presque nue, du *Journal*, à la limite du dicible et de l'exhibitionnisme, contient une expérience universelle. Le 18 juillet 1978 Barthes note : « Chacun son rythme de chagrin »<sup>19</sup>, chacun a son propre rythme narratif du deuil. Barthes fait expérience intime du vide mais il se rend compte qu'il la partage avec les autres. Ses propos restent un témoignage unique mais ils confirment aussi que nous sommes tous les mêmes. Il réalise que son chagrin reste banal, privé de tout esthétisme : « En prenant ces notes, je me confie à la *banalité*

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<sup>16</sup> Barthes, *Journal* 237.

<sup>17</sup> Barthes, *Journal* 232.

<sup>18</sup> Barthes, *Fragments* 259.

<sup>19</sup> Barthes, *Journal* 174.

qui est en moi (29 octobre 1977) »<sup>20</sup> et après « C'est banal – La Mort, le Chagrin ne sont rien que : banals (11 janvier 1979) »<sup>21</sup>.

Pour Barthes comme pour la protagoniste de Kieslowski, la mort est une délivrance. Séparé de son mari et de son passé, Julie affirme sa solitude et son douloureuse autonomie. Elle cherche à vivre sans désirs, sans obligations, sans passé, Barthes mentionne que la mort libère de la dépendance. Tous les deux ils reconnaissent qu'avec le temps l'indépendance perd sa saveur et cède à l'égoïsme qui n'apporte aucun réconfort. Les larmes, les photographies et les visites au cimetière soulagent. Mais si *Le Bleu* de Kieslowski finit par l'abandon de la mélancolie, le *Journal* de Barthes malgré le travail de deuil affirme le désir de la mort qui viendra subitement.

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<sup>20</sup> Barthes, *Journal* 27.

<sup>21</sup> Barthes, *Journal* 234.



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## PHOTOGRAPHIC REALISM IN THE CINEMA OF TURKEY: REVIEW OF NURI BILGE CEYLAN'S FILMS

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The theorist André Bazin, in his essay “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” wrote that the making of images is the creation of an ideal world in a likeness of the real and in this context, the history of the plastic arts may be seen as the essential story of resemblance. However, according to Bazin, photography and cinema are, on the other hand, discoveries that satisfy our obsession with realism. As he focused on the objective character of photography, he pointed out that its objective nature confers a quality of credibility. In other words, “the photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it.” (André Bazin, *What is cinema? Vol 1*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, 14) In addition, the mechanical process of photography does not create eternity as art does, but it embalms time. From this perspective, cinema is objectivity in time.

In the cinema of Turkey, two basic trends appeared during the 90s: On the one hand, there were popular films, mostly influenced by Hollywood examples and on the other, low budget films made by the authors who created their own independent styles. One of that decade’s authors, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, who had previously worked as a photographer, started his career by presenting black and white photographic images in his first short film *Cocoon* (1995) and then maintained this style in his first feature film *The Small Town* (1997). Throughout the following years, despite the developing changes of the film-making process in Turkey, Ceylan has upheld this photographic style throughout his filmography in order to represent life in a realistic way. This study aims to observe the photographic realism of Ceylan’s films in relation to Bazin’s essay and review them from the perspective of his classical realistic theory.

The term realism was used for the literary and art movement of the nineteenth century which went against the tradition of classical idealism and aimed to portray ‘life as it really was’. In the context of the art of cinema, the film camera has been easily accepted as a natural tool for realism, since it reproduces ‘what is there’. That is, films are able to give a direct and truthful view of the real world through the presentation of the characters and their environment. Realism functions in film on both a narrative and figurative/photographic level.<sup>1</sup> In terms of the photographic level, classical theorists André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer have argued cinema as being a realistic art form. According to Bazin, photography and cinema are discoveries that

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) 334.

satisfy our obsession with realism.<sup>2</sup> He claims that “the realism of the cinema follows directly from its photographic nature.”<sup>3</sup> He adds that cinema is, of course, “also a language.”<sup>4</sup>

In the cinema of Turkey, auteurs using photograph-like images in their films, emerged after the 1990s. During that decade, two basic cinematic trends appeared: on the one hand there were popular films, mostly influenced by Hollywood examples and on the other, films made by auteurs of a postindustrial, global cinema administered by the art house and festival circuits.<sup>5</sup> One of the decade’s auteurs, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, who had previously worked as a photographer, started his career with his first short film *Cocoon* (1995) in which he collected black and white photographs and then maintained this original style based on photograph-like images in his first feature film *The Small Town* (1997). Throughout the following years, despite the developing changes of the film-making process in Turkey, this director has continued with this photographic style throughout his filmography in order to represent life in a realistic way. This study aims to observe the photographic realism of Ceylan’s films from the perspective of Bazin’s traditional realistic theory.

## NOTES ON BAZIN’S THEORY

At the beginning of his theoretical approach, Bazin first speaks about the plastic arts which have always aimed to capture and maintain the reality of the world and tried to hold its images eternally. Subsequently, he refers to the inevitability of photography. Bazin believes that photography is the climax of that desire because it is the first art in which the human hand is not involved. Whilst painting requires the skill and mind of an artist confronting an object, photography is a physical process confronting a physical object. According to him, taking a

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<sup>2</sup> André Bazin, *What is cinema?* vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) 12.

<sup>3</sup> Bazin, *What is cinema?* vol. 1 108.

<sup>4</sup> Bazin, *What is cinema?* vol. 1 16.

<sup>5</sup> Savaş Arslan, *Cinema in Turkey: A New Critical History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 240.

photograph is a pure, objective act. At this point, he refers to the word “objectif” in French, which means both “objective” and “lens”.<sup>6</sup> “For Bazin, the ontology of the photographic image is intimately related to his view of realism in film”.<sup>7</sup> Photography and cinema are the arts of the real. Cinema, particularly, depends on a visual and spatial reality.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, he was also aware that the reality of film and photography was “artificial”. That was a paradox since during the transfer of a thing to its image, some human intervention always occurs.<sup>9</sup> He points out that an artist does not transform the reality, but makes a selection of reality.<sup>10</sup> Bazin tried to show how reality functions in cinema. He concluded that the raw material of cinema is not reality itself, but the tracings of reality left on the celluloid. These tracings have two notable properties. First they are genetically related to the reality they mirror, and second, they are already comprehensible. In conclusion, he defined cinema as an *asymptote of reality*, moving closer to it and forever dependent on it. So, film art is what filmmakers do with the tracings of reality.<sup>11</sup>

## REVIEW OF CEYLAN’S FILMS

Bazin’s cinematic realism may be observed throughout various world filmmakers’ movies such as Welles, Flaherty, De Sica and Rossellini. In the cinema of Turkey, it is possible to observe the tracings of this kind of realist approach in Ceylan’s films.

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Kolker, *Film, Form and Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006) 19; Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) 138.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Morgan, “Rethinking Bazin: Ontology and Realist Aesthetics,” *The Film Theory Reader Debates and Arguments*, ed. Marc Furstenuau (London and New York: Routledge, 2010) 110.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew 137.

<sup>9</sup> Kolker 19.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew 154.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew 140-141.

Nuri Bilge Ceylan started his career as a photographer. His interest in the art of photography, kindled during his high school years, blossomed at the Boğaziçi University photography club, where he also took passport-style photos to earn some pocket money. After doing his military service, he decided to give shape to the rest of his life through cinema.<sup>12</sup> He started to make films in order to convey a specified reality that was not taken seriously by the conventional film world.<sup>13</sup>

*Transition from Photograph to Film.* His first short film *Cocoon* (1995) was based on the story of an old couple in their seventies who lived separately and got together again after several years. The director made this experimental short footage using a series of black and white photographs belonging to his mother and father presented to the audience as an old family album. Bazin explains the charm of family albums, the grey or sepia shadows on them which represent the disturbing presence of lives halted at a set moment in their duration, freed from their destiny by a mechanical process. He claims that photography does not create eternity as art does, it embalms time.<sup>14</sup> In this film created by photographs, Ceylan indeed tries to embalm time: As we look through a family album, we try to understand the old couple's feelings and see their life halted at certain moments. As mentioned by Robert Kolker, when we look at a family album we do not ask how the images were constructed, but we desire to see and feel the nostalgia, pain or

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<sup>12</sup> "Nuri Bilge Ceylan-Biography", 29 April 2014. <http://www.nuribilgeceylan.com/bio-english.php>.

<sup>13</sup> Enis Köstepen et al., "Sinema Pratiğini Fotoğrafa Benzetmeye Çalışıyorum," *Nuri Bilge Ceylan Söyleşiler*, ed. Mehmet Eryılmaz (Istanbul: Norgunk, 2012) 79.

<sup>14</sup> Bazin, *What is cinema?* vol. 1 14.

joy of the family members represented in the photographs.<sup>15</sup> This film may be also seen as the cinematic projection of the director's photographic aesthetic.<sup>16</sup>

*The Long and Still Takes*. After the first short film, Ceylan made three full-length feature films described as his “provincial trilogy”: *The Small Town* (1997), *Clouds of May* (1999) and *Distant* (2002). In all of these films, the director enlisted his close friends, relatives and family as actors and took on just about every technical role himself: the cinematography, sound design, production, editing, writing and direction. When *Distant*, the final film of the trilogy, won the Grand Prix at the 2003 Cannes Film Festival, Ceylan suddenly became an internationally recognized name.<sup>17</sup> The first film of the trilogy describes relationships between members of a Turkish family in a small town. The second film, *Clouds of May*, is based on the story of a man named Muzaffer, who returns to his native town to make a movie. The last film, *Distant*, is about a photographer who lives in Istanbul and is obliged to put up a young relative from his small town in his apartment. Thus, it could be noted that this trilogy obviously draws on some moments from the director's personal history, starting with his childhood in a small town and finishing as a photographer and filmmaker in the central city Istanbul.

In this trilogy, while conveying his stories and characters, the director uses new formal methods that are unfamiliar to mainstream cinema audiences. The scenes are composed of long and still takes. Taking advantage of his career as photographer, he uses reframings containing photographic techniques. By giving limited room to dialogues, he brings the image's language to the foreground. He minimizes the camera movements. Since the still images are full of meaning,

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<sup>15</sup> Kolker 20.

<sup>16</sup> Hasan Akbulut, *Nuri Bilge Ceylan Sinemasını Okumak Anlatı, Zaman, Mekân* (Ankara: Bağlam, 2005) 15.

<sup>17</sup> “Nuri Bilge Ceylan-Biography”, 29 April 2014. <http://www.nuribilgeceylan.com/bio-english.php>.

photograph-like images of nature remove the viewers from the course of events for a while and make time become spatial and visible.<sup>18</sup>

*Realist Time on the Screen.* On the topic of conception of time, Bazin writes about “the realist time cinema” by referring to some new realist Italian films. In this context, he refers to De Sica’s film *Umberto D.* as a perfect example of using time in a realistic way. Then he writes: “Until further information is available, until the realization of Zavattini’s dream of filming eighty minutes in the life of a man without a cut, [*Umberto D.*] is without a doubt the ultimate expression of neorealism.”<sup>19</sup>

Ceylan’s films pay close attention to the passing of time on the screen. The first film of the trilogy, *The Small Town*, for example, opens in wintertime, with the images of children playing in the snow; then the second and the third parts of the film are set in spring. Through the cycle of a day and the cycle of seasons, the film conveys a sense of monotony and boredom intrinsic to provincial life, then the splendor of nature that colors it as well. The seasons, the weather and the daytime are represented in long landscape shots in his films.<sup>20</sup> Another example regarding time, can be seen in the film *Climates* produced in 2006 after the provincial trilogy. The story of the film is based on the break-up of a couple and the climates symbolize the different moods of a man and a young woman. The film contains many close-up shots. These long close-up shots serve to convey the reality which cannot be achieved in dialogues. In other words, the director’s camera plunges into people’s faces in order to express visually what cannot be captured in speech.<sup>21</sup> This

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<sup>18</sup> Akbulut 168.

<sup>19</sup> André Bazin, *What is cinema?* vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972) 67.

<sup>20</sup> Asuman Suner, *New Turkish Cinema Belonging, Identity and Memory* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010) 93-94.

<sup>21</sup> Suner 98.

time he tries to explain the people's relationship through the long close-up shots and by frequently using deep focus he refers to the relationship's ambiguity.

At this point, it may be useful to remember Bazin's approach to long take, depth of field and deep focus techniques in cinema.

*Ambivalent Meaning of the Real Life.* Bazin prefers a "depth of field" technique which permits an action to develop over a long period of time and on several spatial planes. He prefers that technique because of its realistic impact. In this way, the director has the option of constructing dramatic interrelationships within the frame. The long take and depth-of-field emphasize the cinema's relation to perceptual reality, particularly to space. Thus, according to Bazin's theory, montage is essentially a less realistic style. On the other hand, techniques such as long take, reframing and shooting in depth provide not only a unity of place and action, but also a rich ambiguity of meaning. In this way, the spectator should be forced to wrestle with the meanings of a filmed event as he/she should wrestle with the meanings of empirical realistic events in his/her daily life.<sup>22</sup> According to Bazin, "depth of focus brings the spectator into a relation with the image closer to that which he enjoys with reality. Therefore it is correct to say that, independently of the contents of the image, its structure is more realistic."<sup>23</sup> "It implies, consequently, both a more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator and a more positive contribution on his part to the action in progress."<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, depth of focus reintroduces ambiguity into the structure of the image as a possibility.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Andrew 157-159, 163.

<sup>23</sup> Bazin, *What is cinema?* vol. 1 35.

<sup>24</sup> Bazin, *What is cinema?* vol. 1 36.

<sup>25</sup> Bazin, *What is cinema?* vol. 1 36.



Bazin gives the example of Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941), mentioning the uses of long takes, focus and the mystery present because of the depth of field in nearly every image. He also gives the example of Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1923) with its famous long takes and shot-sequence, giving the actual length of the waiting period to represent the relation between hunter and the seal. As Bazin claims, in Flaherty's film the length of the hunt is the image's true object.<sup>26</sup>

Additionally, Bazin gives some examples from Italian new-realist films such as *Germany Year Zero* (1948) and *The Bicycle Thief* (1948), which contrast with previous forms of realism in the stripping away of all expressionism and in the absence of the effects of montage. Neorealism tended to give back to cinema a sense of the ambiguity of reality.<sup>27</sup>

With regards to Ceylan's filmography, a notable example could be the last scene of *Distant*. The scene contains approximately one minute of take created with a motionless camera. The minimum movement in this photograph-like shot belongs to the ships, the waves of the sea, the leaves and some pieces of trash flying in the wind. The atmosphere created by the stillness of the image and depth of space represents the man's loneliness and his psychological defeat in the face of the big metropolitan Istanbul. The director repeated another similar photograph-like image in the final scene of his film *Three Monkeys* (2008), which was based on the story of a family's members who try to stay together by covering up the truth. This time, again, the long-take of nearly one minute is all still except the movements of the clouds and the arrival of a train. In terms of Bazin's theory, the still takes bring the spectator into a closer relation with the image in order to enjoy the reality and to think about the ambivalent meaning of the real life.

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<sup>26</sup> Bazin, *What is cinema?* vol. 1 27; Andrew 164-165.

<sup>27</sup> Bazin, *What is cinema?* vol. 1 37.

*Cinematic Screen and Window*. Bazin makes also a comparison between the cinematic screen and the window. According to him, in cinema the screen appears as window. The screen is like a mask which allows only a part of the action/reality to be seen. “When a character moves off screen, we accept the fact that he is out of sight, but he continues to exist in his own capacity at some other place in the décor which is hidden from us.”<sup>28</sup>

In the *Clouds of May*, reframed spaces frequently remain empty until a character comes in, or after the exit of a character. Ceylan creates reframes outside the camera. He uses window moldings or thresholds especially for this purpose. The movie is about the relationship between space and place as well as the relationship between the human and place.<sup>29</sup> The director repeats a similar use of windows in his last film *Winter Sleep* (2014), which is based on the relationship between a former actor, his young wife and his sister living in a small hotel in the center of Anatolia during a long and snowy winter. This time, Ceylan uses the hotel’s windows in order to create reframes and emphasizes the realistic relationship between the characters and place.

*Perfect Representation of Reality Through Technology*. In terms of Bazin’s theory, the technological development, particularly the sound, was necessitated by the desire for a perfect representation of reality.<sup>30</sup> In this context, Ceylan uses the sound and music technology in his films in order to create perfectly realistic impacts. In the above-mentioned trilogy, for example, the sound is a component as characteristic as the image: The films open and finish with sound and these are mostly natural sounds. In *Distant*, sound comes before the image, fills the scene and creates a space. In the beginning of his movies, Ceylan separates the image and sound.

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<sup>28</sup> Bazin, *What is cinema?* vol. 1 105.

<sup>29</sup> Akbulut 24-25

<sup>30</sup> Andrew 139.

*Clouds of May* and *Distant* are similar to each other since in both movies no music is used during the credits, natural sounds might still be heard and after the credits the scene is opened with sounds.<sup>31</sup>

Another similar use of sound reappears at the end of the director's penultimate film *Once Upon A Time in Anatolia* (2011) in which he tells a story of a murder in the province. The last scene of the film which describes a postmortem examination refers to the particular use of natural sounds in order to increase the realistic impact of the phenomenon. The director separates the sound from the image and instead of demonstrating that fact, he prefers to define it through the natural sounds of the examination combined with the scream of the children playing in the garden, which might still be heard when we see the final credits.

## CONCLUSION

In the context of the relation between photography and cinema, David Campany gives the example of Andy Warhol's first film *Sleep* (1963) which was considered a pure expression of time passing. Also, he gives another example from Yasujiro Ozu's films created by the real-time shots of almost static subjects and objects as a breeze on grass, rippling water, trembling trees, an unoccupied bed or a vase.<sup>32</sup> Campany's examples refer to the photographic qualities represented in films. In the Cinema of Turkey some auteurs such as Zeki Demirkubuz, Semih Kaplanoğlu, Reha Erdem who took their films close to the stillness of photography, emerged after 1990s. According to Ceylan, who was one of the pioneers of that period, cinema has become more eternal than photography. This art form has been more powerful in expressing the depth of life.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Akbulut 169.

<sup>32</sup> David Campany, *Photography and Cinema* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008) 17-18.

<sup>33</sup> Güldal Kızıldemir, "Kasaba'lı Anlam Avcısı," *Nuri Bilge Ceylan Söyleşiler*, ed. Mehmet Eryılmaz (Istanbul: Norgunk, 2012) 23.

The Russian writer Anton Chekhov was a major source of inspiration for Ceylan's career. He was also influenced by filmmakers such as Ingmar Bergman, Andrei Tarkovski, Robert Bresson, Michelangelo Antonioni, Yasujiro Ozu, Abbas Kiarostami. Consequently, when he started to make films, he preferred realism based on the photographic qualities of the images. According to the director, "realism is not to be naturalist nor to bring forced rules such as dogma rules. It is actually to be after the truth," and he continues to define realism by stating that:

To me, Chekhov and Dostoyevski are more realist than Gorki even though their methods are not considered so, according to traditional point of view, as well as Tarkovsky is more realist than De Sica. Instead of the superficial one, they are looking for the deeper truth which is not easy to obtain and sometimes they have miraculously succeeded it.<sup>34</sup>

A general review of the director's films taking into account Bazin's theory, reveals that Ceylan's films are based on the photographic properties including still long-takes combined with deep space and reframing. However they use also natural sound in order to provide a perfect representation of reality. By containing these cinematic techniques, his films are experiences which enable the audience to enjoy the realism of the image and obligate him/her to rethink the ambivalent meaning of life. Consequently, Ceylan, who today is recognized by national and international audiences, keeps making minimalist films by following the dynamics of photographic realism.

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<sup>34</sup> Köstegen et al. 79.

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# *F FOR FAKE AND THE PARTICULARITY OF NORMATIVE MORAL ASSESSMENT*

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This paper applies a particularist methodology for film criticism, argued for by Stephen Mulhall in *On Film*. The general idea is that specific films are to be analysed as specimens of self-critical philosophical reflection on the conditions of their own possibility *qua* films. I follow the concreteness of this approach, focusing my analysis on Orson Welles's *F for Fake* and exploring both the philosophical potential of its subject matter and the more cinematic, formal development of this potential in the film. Framing this thematic discussion is a mimetic attempt to replicate the film's rhythmical structure in essay form.

## 1. Mimetic prose

Reading Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed*,<sup>1</sup> one is easily lulled by the text into an experience that replicates the rhythm of the films being discussed. Only an astonishingly gifted writer could so transpose into the framework of criticism the very pace of (different) cinematic constructions without undermining the conceptual denseness of his philosophical accounts of film – a medium which is, after all, “foreign” to philosophers. Thus when Cavell, setting his account against the backdrop of a recollection of his own experience as a compulsive movie-goer,<sup>2</sup> argues that there is something akin to the remembering of dreams in the recollection of movies<sup>3</sup> (in that we sometimes have to rebuild plot and scene sequence, to rescue false links between actor and character from a wobbly, dreamlike memory of screenings), he both omits from his account and

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*. Enlarged Edition (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> See Cavell, Preface xix.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 12: “The importance of memory goes beyond its housing of knowledge. It arises also in the way movies are remembered or misremembered. That will be a live topic in what follows, because my way of studying films has been mostly through remembering them, like dreams. Unlike dreams, there are other equally essential ways of getting at movies, like reading their scripts and learning their outer history and viewing them again and counting and timing their shots. I am going to press my way here not just because I am not equipped for or provided with any other alternative, but because I wouldn't at this stage know what further documentation would be documentation for. My business is to think out the causes of my consciousness of film as it stands”.

induces in his reader the need to elaborate the counterpart impression produced by his own text. In truth, rhythmical mimetic links can be found across different artistic genres (and Cavell's philosophical commentary is certainly intended as an art form), and these are consciously elaborated on in forms of criticism that invite a bridging of genre-specific techniques. A form of this bridging exercise is what I propose in this text: in light of the (daydream-like) resonance of the filmic art of storytelling in Stanley Cavell's philosophical commentary, I aim to enact a similar – and consciously acknowledged – mimetic echoing of the narrative rhythm of Orson Welles's *F for Fake* (1975) in my own critical account of the film. Given the peculiarity of the narrative devices employed in the film, it is of special importance for our mimetic exercise to critically replicate its *speed*. A rhythmically reliable commentary on *F for Fake* ought to be *fast*. Several instances of critique – some indeed from within the film itself – support this claim about mimetic speed: these include Welles's narration, the non-linear editing of the film's takes, Welles's retrospective appraisal of his career in a long sequence of interviews with Peter Bogdanovich, and similar mimetic attempts from the sphere of philosophical discussion (and illustration) of film. My own experience of (and experimentation with) the success of the mimetic hypothesis is inspired by work by Cavell and Stephen Mulhall – work that has prompted my own reconsideration and “re-screening” of the films they both consider and re-perform.

## 2. Screening the discussion

Orson Welles's *F for Fake* is a very strange movie. Released in 1975, it has sometimes been called a “documentary”, or a “documentary essay film”, the subject of which is the story of one of the most prominent art forgers of the twentieth century: the doomed Hungarian painter Elmyr de Hory. In addition, the movie narrates the story of de Hory's biographer, Cliff Irving: a fraudster who was charged, sued, and sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison after his faked autobiography of Howard Hughes was denounced by Hughes himself, in early 1972, to a group of seven journalists during a telephone conference. As a matter of fact, the rhythm of Welles's



movie is so fast, the overlapping of different media genres so dense, that any attempt to classify this artistic confession must remain open to revision. I shall come back to the crucial notion of an “artistic confession” below.

As will become clear, my particular approach to this film has a marked philosophical inflection; it does not primarily concern itself with the film’s technical achievements, and nor does it employ the technical jargon characteristic of film studies. With this said, however, it is my view that, as long as I myself remain aware that my own approach is open to limitless revision (and even to reasoned rejection), my analysis can offer a novel contribution to critical discussion of the film. The structure of my philosophical reading of *F for Fake* is twofold: in the first part of this essay, I will explore the puzzling *narrative structure* of the film (because I do believe it has one, but I also think it is far from straightforward); second, I will focus my reading on the ethically charged topics that Welles brings to the fore in his multifaceted discussion of (and simultaneous dialogue with) forgery in art – not only in painting, but in the movie industry more generally, a world of which he himself was an outstanding representative. In my concluding section, I articulate the fundamental outcomes of the two earlier points and explain how they come together in my proposed heuristic.

### 3. *F for Fake*: a movie?

Welles’s last movie can be said to have the structure of a *report*. And the reporter is, of course, the director himself, whose artistic narcissism is partially disguised by his choosing to focus on the life achievements of two other illustrious fakers. With this said, I shall insist that the mischievousness with which notions such as *fact* and *fiction* (or *fictive fact*) are dealt with in this movie undermines its claim to being a straightforward, classic piece of “reporting”, thus making space for questions about its more complex underlying structure. *F for Fake* invokes ethically and aesthetically charged notions, some of which are pointed out to us by the reporter-director himself in a performed introduction to the story he is about to tell. Among such notions

are *imitation, forgery, fraud, deceit* and *false representation* – notions that take on a more vivid meaning when presented to us not only as thematic concerns in the film, but also as formal technical devices that play a central role in the unfolding of the plot. Indeed, Welles's own acting in the movie only intensifies the dual way in which these notions are revealed to us – as belonging to both form and content – in our role as spectators and interpreters. But can this odd experiment even be counted as a movie? In an essay titled “The World of a Movie”<sup>4</sup> (an illuminating contribution to *Making a Difference: Rethinking Humanism and the Humanities*), James Conant sets forth a notion of “movieness” according to which *F for Fake* would most certainly not count as a movie in the relevant sense. He writes:

Now there are lots of things one can or might mean by the word ‘movie’. *I have no desire to legislate how the word should be used.* But, for the purpose of homing in on the topic that interests me here, I will employ the word in a somewhat restricted sense. I shall use the word ‘movie’ to refer not to any kind of film, but rather only to a *certain species of narrative photographic film*. So, by ‘movie’, in particular, I will mean (what we might begin by calling) a ‘fictional’ – as opposed to non-fictional – film (therefore not documentaries, newsreels, home movies, etc.). And by ‘fictional’, I don’t just mean ‘not true’, say in the way certain kinds of propaganda films can fail to be true; but I mean narrative films – that is, the sort of film that tells a story.<sup>5</sup>

As every attentive reader of Conant's work will know, even the more abstract points made in his essays serve the purpose of discussing the philosophical relevance of *a particular* – in this case a specific film. His local definition is therefore designed for his specific purposes and is not meant to serve as any kind of (philosophically tempting) generalization. As exciting as James Conant's

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<sup>4</sup> James Conant, “The World of a Movie,” *Making a Difference: Rethinking Humanism and the Humanities*, ed. Niklas Forsberg and Susanne Jansson (Stockholm: Thales, 2009) 293-325.

<sup>5</sup> Conant, “The World of a Movie” 296. All emphasis my own.

contribution to *Making a Difference* may be, I have not set myself the task of discussing his proposal at length here; rather, I wish to position his provisional definition as a background against which to develop my own analysis of *F for Fake*. The relevant idea, here, is that the film's very status *as a movie* might be contested, just as Conant contests the status of *Lady in the Lake* (by Robert Montgomery).<sup>6</sup> In the light of the excerpt quoted above, such a challenge would seem to be absolutely legitimate.

Central to Conant's view is the notion that a movie is framed by a *world* – hence the title of his contribution to the volume. For him, the *world of the movie* is really what allows the viewer, as the movie cuts from one shot to the next, “to understand the principle of unity that governs their connection”.<sup>7</sup> I wish to argue that *F for Fake* *does* provide the viewer with such a principle of unity – even though it is revealed at a very fast pace – and that it is framed by a world, just as Conant understands it. This, of course, must be justified by exploring both the formal and the thematic features of Welles's production. In this odd, tentative “report” (Welles's last major motion picture, as it happens<sup>8</sup>), Welles sets forth several interwoven narratives, each aimed at inquiring into the artistic value of art forgeries. What is more, it is a film that carries on Welles's tradition of at least partially playing himself in his works – a theme to which we shall return below (see, for instance, the recurrent employment of his own tenor voice as a narrative signature of his productions, or even his brief self-introduction at the end of *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942),<sup>9</sup> his first Hollywood flop). In *F for Fake*, this narrative signature works as follows. By way of introduction, on an improvised stage – in fact a train platform – Welles announces portentously

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<sup>6</sup> *Lady in the Lake* [feature film] Dir. Robert Montgomery. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, USA, 1947. 105mins.

<sup>7</sup> Conant, “The World of a Movie” 296.

<sup>8</sup> *Don Quixote* (or *Don Quixote de Orson Welles*), a project Welles had been working on intermittently since 1957, would only be released posthumously in 1992, at the Cannes Film Festival – *Don Quixote de Orson Welles* [feature film] Dir. Orson Welles. El Silencio, Spain, 1992. 113mins.

<sup>9</sup> *The Magnificent Ambersons* [feature film] Dir. Orson Welles. RKO Radio Pictures, USA, 1942. 88mins.

that what follows is a film about “trickery and fraud – about lies”.<sup>10</sup> He then goes on to present its full cast of characters (like Welles, each actor has been cast as him- or herself), promising furthermore that everything to be *narrated over the next hour* will be the absolute truth. Welles’s camera then focuses on Elmyr de Hory’s account of his career as a professional art forger. After Elmyr’s self-introduction, we learn, again via Welles in his studio, that the former was a struggling artist who turned to forgery out of desperation and poverty only to see the greater share of his profits go to doubly unscrupulous art dealers. As partial compensation for this injustice, Elmyr was maintained in a villa in Ibiza by one of his dealers. All these events are described in full in Cliff Irving’s biography of Elmyr, which Irving was invited to write after his own authorized *fabrication* of Howard Hughes’s biography was denounced by the American magnate himself, who, after years of reclusion, finally gave a telephone conference to a group of journalists clearing up the issue and denouncing Irving’s fake. Then, after Elmyr had hired Irving to write his biography, Orson Welles hired the latter to appear in his movie and tell us about his professional relationship with Elmyr. In addition, and from the very first shot of the movie (that is, the movie *F for Fake* itself, which frames the other movies, pieces of documentaries, and flashbacks of Welles’s early career contained within it) we are also introduced to Oja Kodar – Welles’s final companion and co-writer of the film’s script – whose performance in the movie thus far had consisted only in a sort of catwalk exhibition to male admirers, done in their ignorance of the presence of a camera. One hour after Welles’s solemn announcement of the film’s fidelity to the truth, Kodar is finally given a role in the movie (or, given the film’s frequent blurring of the divide between the real lives of its characters and fictionalized accounts of them – its tendency to blend reports of the first with fabricated stories based on these reports – Oja then reports the story of her life to us). Welles then narrates a story in which Oja poses for a series of nudes by Pablo Picasso after having the painter agree to give her the resulting paintings. We see Oja carrying canvases and are told of a scandal in the art

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<sup>10</sup> *F for Fake* [feature film] Dir. Orson Welles. Specialty Films, France/ Iran/ West Germany, 1975. 85mins.

world that occurred the day after Picasso had given his muse the nudes. Oja's grandfather – supposedly a well-known Croatian art forger – is alleged to have sold faked Picassos in place of the genuine nudes to reputed art galleries. And finally, Orson Welles – the greatest forger of them all in this parody, as we shall discuss in what follows – makes his own local artistic confession of trickery, fraud and lies by reminding the absorbed spectator (although perhaps instead of “absorbed” we should say “stupid” – a term that Welles, correcting himself, applied to his character in an earlier movie, also an absorbed spectator of his own love life<sup>11</sup>) that he had only promised to tell the truth for one hour. As he reveals: “for the last seventeen minutes, I have been lying my head off.”<sup>12</sup>

#### 4. A shot of interpretation

Orson Welles's documentary on the relationship between two well-known fakers – Elmyr and Irving – functions as a slightly disguised structural self-critique. This aspect, which I have labelled “artistic self-confession”, is what provides *F for Fake* with the so-called “movie-world”, picked out by James Conant as the defining principle of movies as such. Welles's self-critique and retrospective appraisal of his career as a whole is what binds the fragmentary and apparently dissociated shots that unify *F for Fake* into a significant and organic whole: the telling of a story. And this organic story is cleverly gathered around a cluster of issues – namely, the artistic status of art forgeries and their original counterparts, and the moral (un)credibility of forgers and consumers of faked artworks. Welles's performance is, as usual, many-layered. The movie director, who is also the movie narrator, presents the biographical incidents of the main (real) characters depicted in *F for Fake* in order to address – always at a very fast pace and without explanation – his own (highly successful) career as a forger of ethically charged stories. As it

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<sup>11</sup> This occurred in the last scene of *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948), a movie by Orson Welles, distributed by Columbia Pictures and featuring Welles and Rita Hayworth – *The Lady from Shanghai* [feature film] Dir. Orson Welles. Columbia Pictures, USA, 1948. 87mins.

<sup>12</sup> *F for Fake* (1975; dir. Orson Welles).

happens, his status as a highly praised filmmaker, now at the end of his vocation, allowed him to avoid trouble with the law (contrary to what happened to Irving and de Hory), if not trouble with the studios.<sup>13</sup> I would like to insist upon this point: what is at stake in *F for Fake* is both the artistic value of forged pieces of art and the ethical issues raised by their marketing to producers, consumers, corruptible evaluators and art-dealers – cases that often prompt a healthy dose of moral contempt. It is altogether surprising, then, that no such contempt is standardly felt for Welles himself: the highly praised and well-paid film director, who spent years forging *stories* and systematically blurring the line between fact and fiction, a parallel playfully explored in the faked documentary that is our focus here. Building upon the philosophical approach to *F for Fake* that I have been developing thus far, I believe we can transpose the film's narrative depiction of morally charged concepts to a more familiar platform for debate. I therefore want to suggest, in line with Stephen Mulhall's interpretive assessment of the philosophical potential of the *Alien* saga,<sup>14</sup> that a subtle elaboration of some of the concrete thematic issues explored in *F for Fake* can bring about an alternative way of thinking about moral disagreement in philosophy: namely, to stop conceiving of moral disagreement on the model of opposing opinions supported by general, normative ethical principles and instead to view this form of disagreement as *a conflict among different worldviews*. In a chapter titled "Film as Philosophy: the priority of the particular"<sup>15</sup> (included in the second edition of *On Film*), Mulhall presents a view on debating ethically charged notions raised in film that matches what would seem to be Welles's own position in his role as the narrator of *F for Fake*. In this chapter, Mulhall stresses the importance of overcoming an approach to disagreements about ethically charged notions raised in specific films that relies on

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<sup>13</sup> For an extremely well-documented and first person account of Welles's problems with Hollywood main studios, see Orson Welles and Peter Bogdanovich, *This is Orson Welles* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Mulhall, "Kane's Son, Cain's Daughter: Ridley Scott's *Alien*," "Making Babies: James Cameron's *Aliens*," "Mourning Sickness: David Fincher's *Alien 3*," "The Monster's Mother: Jean Pierre Jeunet's *Alien Resurrection*," *On Film: Second Edition*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Mulhall, "Film as Philosophy: the priority of the particular," *On Film: Second Edition* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008) 129-157.

the model of *opposing personal opinions, backed up by general ethical principles or norms*. He proposes and discusses an alternative model for debating these issues in relation to the *Alien* saga, where the relevant notions include embodiment, alien pregnancy and self-preservation, but for the film I have been analysing here a counterpart set of ethically charged terms would include, for instance, *authorship, faked authorship, fraud and forging*. Mulhall's alternative treats the resolution of moral disagreement about issues raised in film as a matter of *reconceiving worldviews* rather than the alignment of particular and conflicting opinions against a firm set of ethical principles or laws:

Discussion here may take the form of encouraging one's interlocutor not so much to change her mind about a particular course of action but to look at everything differently – and so to find moral significance where it did not previously seem to exist, as well as to find that what previously seemed highly morally significant was in fact trivial or even essentially illusory.<sup>16</sup>

Now, when one compares this philosophical stance with a quotation by Orson Welles himself in *F for Fake*, affinities between the two positions plainly emerge. After having recited some verses from Kipling, Welles turns to us and asks: "It is pretty, but is it art? – Well, how is it valued? The value depends on opinion, opinion depends on the experts, a faker like Elmyr makes fools of the experts, so who is the expert? Who's the faker?"<sup>17</sup>

It is only by accepting a revision (or a reversal, or even an upending) of conventional moral principles guiding moral judgement that one can understand the artistic (and even commercial) value of a forged piece of art, statements about it, the meaning of these evaluations and, most important of all, the consistency and artistic merit of *F for Fake*. What is more, at the end of this

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<sup>16</sup> Mulhall, "Film as Philosophy" 140.

<sup>17</sup> *F for Fake* (1975; dir. Orson Welles).

reversal you might find that you can (or even need to) dispense altogether with sets of judgements guided by conventional moral principles. Needless to say, it was by no means an accident that someone like Orson Welles should have chosen the form of a would-be documentary to raise these ethically charged and self-reflective questions. To a certain extent, it is unlikely that a traditional commercial studio would have been willing or able to produce a film of precisely this sort: a bold and complex parody of the line between fact and fiction (a film with regards to which, in such circumstances, we would likely be informed that “all characters ... are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead is purely coincidental”<sup>18</sup>). Orson Welles surely knew this much; indeed, his longstanding conflict with mainstream Hollywood (dating back to his interaction with RKO in 1940) is forcefully illustrated in a conversation with Peter Bogdanovich, on the topic of Welles’s second Hollywood production, *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942):

OW: *Ambersons* is the only picture of mine I’ve seen after it was finished and released.

PB: When?

OW: One evening, when they had a special showing in Paris, André Gide, who’d invited me to dinner, told me we were going to it, so I was trapped. It was most unpleasant. I would have been happier never to know and just *hear* what had been done to it. For five or six reels things weren’t so bad. I thought, ‘Well, that isn’t so bad. They didn’t do too many things – only a few stupid little cuts’. And then all hell broke loose. It was a much better picture than *Kane* – if they’d just left it as it was.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> This is the standard version of the so-called “All persons fictitious disclaimer” statement.

<sup>19</sup> Orson Welles and Peter Bogdanovich, *This is Orson Welles* 94-95. Welles left Hollywood for Rio de Janeiro to shoot a documentary on the Carnival there soon after having finished his own cut of the movie; its release and final production were then left in the hands of the studio, with Robert Wise as the main editor.



This struggle is further reflected in Peter Bogdanovich's reflection on the film's production, written in light of a thorough gathering of interviews, telegrams, studio reports and press critiques from both before and after the movie's US release in 1942:

[...] Orson sent another twelve single-spaced pages of instructions for fixing *Ambersons*. Most of these were ignored, because in Hollywood the panic had only increased. RKO began inviting 'experts' in to look at the film and tell them how to save it. [...] So the revisions went on: more cuts were made, new scenes were written. In truth, it is a testament to Welles' genius that the movie remains as effective as it is despite the amount of tampering that went on. But a consideration of the cut sequences will give an idea of how much the picture was diminished.<sup>20</sup> The film was finally released in August 1942; since several sections were taken up with scenes Welles had not written or directed, there was actually even less Welles footage in its eighty-eight minutes.<sup>21</sup>

These excerpts from Bogdanovich's book, itself welcomed by Welles as a way to "set the record straight",<sup>22</sup> shed light on how this peculiar fabrication of authorship both haunted and harmed Welles, perhaps serving as yet another real-life inspiration for *F for Fake*.

## 5. Final montage: there are no coincidences

Throughout this essay, I set my personal interpretation of *F for Fake* against the background of a conversation with philosophers whose readings of films privilege the particular when articulating more general philosophical patterns of reasoning. Neither my choice of movie nor these philosophical affinities are accidental. The interpretive bridges (or thematic affinities)

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<sup>20</sup> Bogdanovich includes as an appendix to the book from 1993 the original script of *The Magnificent Ambersons* (Orson Welles and Peter Bogdanovich, *This is Orson Welles* 454-491).

<sup>21</sup> Orson Welles and Peter Bogdanovich, *This is Orson Welles* 124-125.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Bogdanovich, introduction to *This is Orson Welles* xix: "The whole point of the book he had invited me to do with him, he said, was to 'set the record straight', something he seemingly wished to do on nearly everything that had happened in his life."

between my adaptive reading of philosophical views on film, Welles's film, and Welles's artistic (so, technical or formal) depiction of these thematic affinities in the film itself must finally be considered. As I argue in section three, James Conant's notion of a "movie-world" is unorthodoxly established in *F for Fake* via a disguised and poignant final artistic confession, cleverly articulated by Welles through the stories of two infamous forgers. This masked self-critique can be seen as a materialization of Mulhall's proposal of an anti-normative revision of common ethical stances – only this time such a change is more than a mere attitude or inflection on our part as spectators. This anti-normative attitude is *staged* in a movie concerned not only with the exposition of real-life cases of fraud and art forgery, but also with the amusing incorporation of a fabricated story of forgery within its own narrative – namely, the ultimately fake story of Oja's interaction with Picasso. The fabricated narrative about Picasso, Oja and her grandfather is the only story about art forgery within the movie that, as it turns out, is also itself untrue. What this puzzling structure really shows is that, in the universe of *F for Fake*, one really cannot understand what is going on in the film at all to the extent that one clings to standard normative patterns of assessment in interpreting the narrated events. By way of conclusion, I would say that Welles's last production is not merely a particular movie that philosophical analysis can dissect: more than that, it is a movie about the very particularity of *every single movie*, recollecting and incorporating, as it does, the entire body of Welles's work – including not only his films, but all the various artistic endeavours in which he engaged.<sup>23</sup> The commercial failure of *F for Fake* at the time of its release might also be accounted for by citing the philosophical side effects I have been exploring. At the time of *F for Fake*'s release (and perhaps still today), spectators and critics alike might not have been prepared to *undress* the normative model of assessing opinions and patterns of action against a set of fixed normative rules, just as readers of Mulhall's philosophical proposal might not be prepared to accept the significance of the

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<sup>23</sup> Welles was a magician, a pianist, a painter, writer, a theatre actor and director; he performed on the radio and taught film direction at several universities.

example (the particular) for the discipline of philosophy. Compelling proof of this last species of unwillingness is confirmed by Mulhall's repeated description, prevalent among the new sections of the second edition of *On Film*, of the misunderstanding and intolerance with which his readings of Hollywood blockbusters were received on the part of philosophers and film scholars alike. As far as mimetic prose goes, my effort here has also turned out to have a duplicative effect: not only has the rhythm of *F for Fake*'s narrative unfolding been replicated, but the anti-normative model put forth by Mulhall has been mapped onto my interpretative reading of Welles's final motion picture.

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## THINKING TECHNOLOGY IN TIME: PROCESS-TIME AND PRODUCT-TIME IN TECHNOLOGICAL ANIME

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Japanese animation stands in a particularly complex relationship with technology: being a technological medium itself, its thematic content tends also to concern technological issues, such as the artificial extension of human capacities and the effects of technology on individual and collective identity. Authors such as Thomas Lamarre and Vanina Papalini have stressed the complementarity between these two dimensions, nothing that anime involves not only thinking in technology, but also thinking through technology. Following this line of thought, we believe that Japanese animation forms (and many other forms of cinematography) should be considered as thinking devices in a strong sense, as they extend the cognitive capacities of viewers, affording them new kinds of collective reflection.

We focus specifically on one of this 'ways of thinking' made possible by technologically themed anime: a particular style of reflection on the nature of time. We contend that the close relationship between technical form and technological content in anime -exemplified, for instance in the dialogue between the techniques of limited animation and full animation in the history of science fiction anime- has contributed to the emergence of a *sui generis* style of depictions of temporality in technological anime. Amongst other characteristical features, these depictions tend to highlight the difference between two fundamental aspects of temporality: the time of production or process-time, and the time-as-result or product-time. We illustrate this with a brief analysis of the treatments of temporality in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell*, where we try to show, on the one hand, how these treatments are connected to technical aspects of animation, and on the other, how the depictions of temporality presented relate to philosophical distinctions such as that between duration and spatialised time in the philosophy of Henri Bergson and that between process and chronology in Gilbert Simondon's works.

In her book *Anime, Mundos tecnológicos, animación japonesa e imaginario social*,<sup>1</sup> Vanina Papalini points to the fact that in many technologically-themed animes technology is used to represent either *the limits of what is human* or *the relationship between the human and the inhuman*. When that is the case, technology tends to appear as imbued with a supernatural character and connected to mythical or mystical elements with a markedly temporal aspect: through the intermediation of prophecies and apocalyptic scenarios, technology appears as crucially connected to both the *significance of the past* and the *possibility of the future*. In fact,

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<sup>1</sup> Vanina Papalini, *Anime: mundos tecnológicos, animación japonesa e imaginario social* (Buenos Aires: La Crujía, 2006).

the relationship established between time and technology in anime tends to go well beyond the usual identification of technology with the future. As Papalini notes, science fiction anime seems to be an especially appropriate milieu for the emergence of non-hegemonic visions of temporality, a place where the simplistic discourse based on the equation “technology=progress” is called into question. The fact that anime itself is perceived somehow as a particularly technological medium is identified by Papalini as a crucial factor to be acknowledged when considering this particularity.

Thomas Lamarre’s work offers an in-depth exploration of this “particular technological character” of anime. In his book *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*,<sup>2</sup> Lamarre distances himself from the usual “textualistic” academic readings of anime, and presents a theory of animation that aims to answer the question “how should we read anime?” not by pretending that animation is just “another text”, but by focusing instead on its technological specificity. Lamarre’s proposal does not stop at providing a list of elements relevant to the formal analysis of animes (lighting, color, sound, shots, narrative, editing, etc.): he presents an analysis of content based on the very materiality of the moving image. With a theoretical basis strongly inspired by the philosophy of technology (especially by authors such as Heidegger and Simondon), but also by film theory and art history, Lamarre rejects any deterministic notion of cultural or technological specificity. Instead, he tries to answer some fundamental questions about the technicity of Japanese animation from a *process* perspective. The result is a book that avoids discussing classical issues such as the representation of Japanese culture in anime, the technical details of animation or the fan phenomenon, focusing entirely on showing *how anime thinks technology*:

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Lamarre, *The anime machine: A media theory of animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

thinking about technology is inseparable from thinking through technology (not only using technology but also aligning thought with its operations). In this context, I refer to technical determination, which is not determinism but a sort of underdetermination. The implication is that determination is at once material and immaterial. Or, put another way, there is indeterminacy to determination, which generates an interval or spacing in which thinking might arise. I might have also said “anime thinks through technology.” But I favor the expression «thinking technology» to avoid implying that technologies are neutral mediators whose work is done when the concept appears, or whose operations vanish from the scene of thought and are therefore negligible.<sup>3</sup>

And some pages after that, he adds:

to look at how anime think technology is to call attention to the material limits of anime, which at once constrain their “thinking” and make it possible. The animetic machine is, in this sense, an internal limit within the materiality of animation that allows for a distinctively animetic manner of doing, feeling, and thinking, of working on the world. While this approach grants a certain degree of autonomy to animation in a manner reminiscent of the specificity thesis for cinema, the goal is not to present anime as an enclosed, self-sufficient, autopoietic entity.<sup>4</sup>

We believe that Lamarre and Papalini are right: i. e., (a) that anime acts, by virtue of its material and technological specificity, as a *thinking device* of sorts, allowing us to explore discourses and notions that would probably remain unnoticed (or not come to be at all) without it, and (b) that issues related with technicity and temporality (and with their relationship) are amongst the most interesting outcomes of this *animetic thought*.

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<sup>33</sup> Lamarre xxx-xxi.

<sup>4</sup> Lamarre xxxi.

As Lamarre notes, the idea here is not that Japanese animation or cinema in general are independent, autonomous entities with “ideas of their own”:

We will focus on three animes: *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, the original series originally aired from 1995 to 1996, and the films *Akira* (1988) and *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), both adaptations of manga series. All three works present near futures in which technology plays a crucial role. In *Akira* and *Evangelion*, technology has lead the world to an apocalyptic scenario. In all three, technological advance is presented as leading humanity to a new step in its evolution, but posing, at the same time, a terrible risk. Most interestingly, all three works use different strategies to mark the distinction between two forms of temporality: the time of the story itself, i.e., that in which the characters live their lives and confront their problems in an orderly, linear manner, and a different sort of temporality that contradicts this sequential progress and defies its logic, but seems to hold the key to the ultimate sense of the story. In this transgressive second form of temporality (or, we may say, through its disruptive intervention), the past refuses to remain “passed”, completed, presenting itself instead as something active and mutable, and the present unfolds itself through a betrayal of all expectations, as if somehow avoiding its predetermined destination to get into entirely new places.

The second form of temporality is presented as a deeper, more fundamental reality than the first one, which is presented either as its superficial aspect or its residue. In the former, the meaning of the story is decided; in the second, this meaning is presented to the characters (and the viewers), but only in an incomplete and fragmentary way. One form of temporality is presented as an irreversible “time of the process,” genuinely creative but irreducible to any static order or description, while the other, orderly and explicit but superficial, is presented as a “time of the product.”

Additionally, these two temporalities are presented as standing in a very peculiar relationship with technology, and particularly with the idea of a *technology of animation* or



*animated technology*. In all three works, at the beginning of the story technology is identified with dead, inactive matter; however, as the narrative unfolds, technology is revealed to be active and, to an extent, autonomous, and the limits separating the technological object from the living thing and the human from the machine are progressively dissolved. In a sense, this can be read as a discourse on the nature of anime and the animation technique. As commented before, animation cannot be reduced to the technologically mediated production of sequences of static images: it supposes and requires the existence of a complex set of active relations in which individuals, discourses, technologies, markets... (etc.) intermingle. However, this discourse is also, at the same time, an ontological discourse, one about the general relations that hold between technology, temporality, and human life (understood as human existence): a discourse that refuses to reduce either *technological objects* or *human existence* to a sum of inert, static parts. These two aspects of the animetic thought about technology are, in any case, deeply interrelated, having emerged from the concrete processes in which anime and its culture are produced and reproduced; the ease with which both aspects lend themselves to comparison with the ideas of authors such as Bergson and Simondon (as we will see in a moment) is all the more interesting for that fact.

In *Akira*, the division between forms of temporality is expressed through the contrast between the generally hectic pace of the film and the presence of a series of slowdowns that break this rhythm. The film follows, in this regard, a strategy opposed to that of the manga and adapted to the specific possibilities of animation. In the original manga series, where the reader could easily go back and forth and spend as much time as needed on any picture, the strategy to force the appreciation of a time other than that of the narration was precisely to accentuate the staticity of the images, forcing the reader to “wait” for narrative time to pass, and therefore, in a sense, stand outside it. In the movie, the action unfolds almost too quickly for us to follow. We are forced to hurry our thoughts up to keep up with the film, to hasten into the future of the story without fully understanding many of the things we see. But then, at certain points, the story

slows down unexpectedly and confronts us with what we could call “invasions of the past”. Mysterious characters strangely resembling old children appear. In a surrealistic and terrifying scene, Tetsuo is attacked by dreadful animated toys and teddy bears just after waking from a nightmare about his past. In the final scenes, Tetsuo loses control of his power and turns into a mass of living flesh oddly resembling a baby, only to finally explode giving way to what seems to be the origin of the universe. In moments like these, the ostensible logic of the science-fiction story seems to fade away, and another more complex order is displayed: an order in which the separation between the “inside” and the “outside” no longer holds. Always against the background, provided by the science fiction story, of a relationship between life and technology in which the latter shows its true nature to be an *incomplete and active* one, we are presented with situations in which bodies lose their limits, individual identities and subjectivities blend, and the moments of time stop being external to one another. And, most notably, these are not mere accidents to be solved later by a synthetic resolution: these transgressions become more and more relevant until the apocalyptic resolution of the film, where they are revealed to be what the story was about.

The meaning of this suspension (or perhaps refutation) of the difference between the present and the past, between the inside and the outside is even more clearly presented in Neon Genesis Evangelion. In *The Anime Machine*, Lamarre analyses the use of *full limited* animation techniques in Evangelion and other animes, identifying this kind of animation with the Deleuzean idea of the time-image. While full animation (in which a maximum number of detailed drawings are used to give the sensation of realistic movement) is usually considered the “most artistic” animation technique, Lamarre shows how the combination of advanced full animation technique and static and stylized elements typical of limited animation produces surprising effects on the representation of temporality in Evangelion:

At times you suspect that either your TV or your disk is not working properly, that something is catching or skipping. Images remain still far too long, and sometimes the cuts are far too rapid. Obviously, however, such stillness and the effect of surprise that it produces happen within a field of movement. ... In sum, Anno Hideaki's animations place dramatic limits on character action and continuity editing, yet these limitations imply a confrontation with the moving image. It is not a matter of stasis in opposition to movement. Hyperlimited animation entails a very different way of dealing with the animetic interval, a distinctive relation to the multiplanar machine. Needless to say, because it has its specific way of channeling the force of the moving image, hyperlimited animation also implies a specific manner of thinking the question of technological condition.<sup>5</sup>

While the use of this “hyperlimited animation” technique is an important resource, we believe that it is just a part of a more general strategy. Following, again, the division between two different forms of temporality, Anno's magnum opus alternates traditional narrative parts with non-narrative parts in which the series seeks to interpellate the viewers, forcing them to reflect on their very role as viewers and its implications. During the series, we are lured to think that some of these non-narrative parts represent the interiority of Shinji's (the protagonist) and other character's minds; but as the ending approaches, this rationalisation becomes untenable. We are induced to believe that we are going to witness an apocalyptic event taking place in the fictional world of the series, “The Human Instrumentality Project”, in which humanity will reach its next evolutionary step and all individuals will lose their physical and psychical independence, literally fusing to form a unique amorphous being. But then, before we can see this happen, the very structure of the plot seems to dissolve, and we are unexpectedly confronted with a series of strange non-narrative scenes in which our own “interiority” and our independence with respect

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<sup>5</sup> Lamarre 197.

to the fiction and its creators are directly put into question. What we are looking at in the final chapters of *Evangelion* is at the same time an exposition of the relations subtending the process of production of animation, and something much deeper: an ontological statement on the dynamic character of existence and on the impossibility to confront it authentically while we conceive of it in terms of determined, external, complete and independent parts.

This motif of the relationship between the parts and the whole is what structures the division of temporality in *Ghost in The Shell*. The story is set on a world where the limits between human and machine have been blurred by the possibility to replace any human organ with technological parts. The film conveys a certain sense of menace, a fear of humanity “losing its soul.” However, and while many elements in the movie (and in the later sequel and series) remind us of the uncanny valley and the horrors of the artificial; its resolution points in the opposite direction. We cannot but notice that the main character’s humanity is not lessened at all by her condition as cyborg; in fact, both Major Kusanagi and The Puppet Master, the artificial consciousness that serves as antagonist, are presented as intelligent, even spiritual beings. The main contrast is that between the time of consciousness, represented by the continuity of sound (music and dialogue) and gesture, and the fragmented time of external parts (represented by static images). However, the first form of temporality (the living, animated one) is always alluded to indirectly, as if pointing to the fact that it is impossible to find the ghost by looking at the machine. We only have direct access to Kusanagi’s humanity in that we are able to identify with her through the story, feeling what she feels; and as Kusanagi, in the resolution of the film, decides to fuse herself with the Puppet master, we are invited to extend this identification with technology itself. Again, interior and exterior are presented as mere static pictures unable to represent the evolving nature of life.

While it would be impossible to explore this relationship in depth here today, it is worth noting that the particular notions of temporality that emerge in certain late 20<sup>th</sup> century techno-

themed anime have a strong resemblance with those presented in the works of Henri Bergson (1859-1941) and Gilbert Simondon (1924-1989).

Simondon's philosophy is based on the concept of individuation. In his *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information*,<sup>6</sup> Simondon explains that most traditions in philosophy and science have failed to acknowledge the fact that reality is more than a sum of individuals connected by purely external relationships: any individual appears in relation with a complementary milieu through a real, irreducible process of individuation. To Simondon, understanding reality requires paying attention to the way real change occurs through the mediation of real, constitutive dynamic relations. The notion of the individual, ultimately based on a static abstraction of the technically produced object, fails to capture the true nature of being, which is that of a phasic being, a being that is always “out of phase” with respect to itself, and which unfolds in time not as an external sequence of moments populated by individuals, but the progressive solution of the incompatibilities between disparate singularities through the establishment of relations. The time of linear external moments is one of the many “chronologies” that emerge as a result of this process (specifically, at the level of social individuation).

Simondon ideas are, in turn, deeply influenced by Bergson's distinction between the abstract notion of time produced by action-oriented intelligence and true time or duration (*durée*) as directly perceived by intuition. According to what Bergson exposes in works such as *Matière et mémoire*<sup>7</sup> and *L'Évolution créatrice*,<sup>8</sup> the same kind of intelligence that has made us able to dominate nature through technology has a “spatializing” bias: it tends to see the world in terms of definite, external spatial parts. The notion of time as a succession of external moments is a

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<sup>6</sup> Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information* (Paris: Éditions Jérôme Millon, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968).

<sup>8</sup> Henri Bergson, *L'Évolution créatrice* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969).

product of this bias; however, direct intuition (a form of introspection) shows that the true nature of time is *duration*, a genuinely creative flow in which qualitatively different but inseparable moments follow each other in a purely additive movement. In Bergsonian duration, the past is never destroyed but modified and preserved, and the passage of time involves the apparition of true irreducible novelty; our perception of matter evolving in a spatialised linear time is the result of a selection operated by intelligence according to our practical needs.

The resemblances between Simondon and Bergson's theories on temporality and the way time is thought in technologically themed anime are indicative of the insufficiencies of the traditional conception of time, and of the fact that a certain conception of the role of technology in human life contributes to hinder our basic understanding of temporality. However, they are also indicative of the capacity of anime to promote insightful reflections and put them in a dialogue with philosophical tradition. The particular status of the animetic machine as a markedly technological resource for thinking makes anime an ideal place to look for solutions to our conceptual problems about time.

## ON FILM ANALYSIS AND REPRESENTATION: KRZYSZTOF KIEŚLOWSKI'S *AMATEUR* (*AMATOR*, 1979)

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The supremacy of the visual in the cinema, constantly understood as an analogous or true “copy” of reality, of real objects, especially in relation to other space arts, which can also be linked with the notion of the camera seen as the “eye” (Dziga Vertov), is closely linked as well with the patterns of the narrative model of dominant cinema. “Partly because of the work of ‘realistic’ Hollywood films, which inculcate a certain pre-determined reality in the spectator, the work is seen as natural rather than constructed, and therefore beyond the reach of political change” (Peter Brunette). This inevitably takes into account notions such as the dichotomies image/referent, signifier/signified; it becomes diaphanous, it brings into play and questions notions of representation and, therefore, notions of the opposed “reality”/“fiction,” inside/outside the frame. This approach stems from a focus on a reevaluation of the notion of “representation” in Krzysztof Kieślowski’s film *Amateur* (*Amator*, 1979), together with some ideas related to the gaze and its impact on the textual analysis of films, especially since the film questions, among other things, the masquerade, the boundaries, and the portrayal of representation.

A large number of questions arise when considering notions such as representation and realism within cinematic language which consequently become crucial in current film theory. This article aims to sketch some notes for a proposal of film analysis in relation to representation in a way that can penetrate in the construction and articulation of the text’s ideological elements.

This interest stems from the fact that most of the approaches or studies regarding film analysis are still based, or arise from the idea that what we call “phenomenic reality”, or the “Real” (in Lacanian terms), exists as opposed to semiotic discourse, or texts that depict or represent that reality. Nevertheless, one of the fields where this has become perhaps more questioned is gender studies “beyond sexual difference”. For Teresa de Lauretis, cinema is just one social technology (in Michel Foucault’s sense of the word), among others, that shapes or constructs, in this case, gender. Likewise, it should not be forgotten that this “phenomenic reality” constitutes itself a naturalized model of the world, fossilized as history and taken as

objective<sup>1</sup>. In other words, the opposition “phenomenic reality”/semiotic discourse is actually simultaneously interweaved and interrelated in a complex perception and conception of both. As Stuart Hall so well exposed (in his case, addressing cultural identity),

[p]erhaps, instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished historical fact, which the new cinematic discourses then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.<sup>2</sup>

The tradition that has addressed cinema from this realistic perspective, paying considerable attention to mimesis, to analogy and to the referent for the constitution of meaning, relates to the primacy of the visual, constantly understood as analogical or as loyal “copy” of “reality” or real objects, especially in relation to other arts or cultural manifestations, not to mention the analysis of this “reality” and/or search, and sometimes imposition, of the chronological or thematic linearity that, according to Peter Brunette and David Wills, traditional cinema would try to synchronize, suturing the voice and image to provide a “realistic image”.<sup>3</sup>

According to Robert Stam’s reading of Mikhail Bakhtin: “art does not represent reality in its changing forms; rather, it exhibits the changing forms of representation [...] artistic discourse, for Bakhtin, constitutes a refraction of a refraction –that is, a mediated version of an already textualized socioideological world.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Manuel Asensi, “Los modelos de mundo de Gus van Sant: *Elephant*,” *Archivos de la Filmoteca* 72 (2013). No pagination.

<sup>2</sup> Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation,” *Film and Theory. An Anthology*, ed. Robert Stam and Toby Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) 704.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Brunette and David Wills, *Screen/Play. Derrida and Film Theory* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989) 60.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Stam, *Subversive Pleasures. Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 50.



As Manuel Asensi observes, in an interview from 2003 Gus van Sant stated that his film *Elephant* (2003) investigates a similar area than that of the murders in *Columbine*, but that his story was not that of *Columbine*. Van Sant's film is not or does not directly just represent the phenomenonic reality occurred in 1999 in Littleton; he deformed it so it became an investigation of that type of event. It is another model of the world that interferes in different ways with the model of the world of those events and with ours.<sup>5</sup>

As Asensi assesses, if we do not proceed to separate the text from its meaning or referent, no analysis, strictly speaking, can take place. The reason for this is that, persuaded by what the text says or tells, it entails as well the inability to perceive *how* the text says or tells it.<sup>6</sup>

One can argue, together with Gilles Deleuze, that the conception of history in the monumental history film, for example, treats phenomena "as effects in themselves, separate from any cause,"<sup>7</sup> where a parallelism between civilisations is imposed. According to Deleuze, Eisenstein shows that, since Griffith, the main technical aspects of American montage, such as alternate parallel editing, "relate back to this social and bourgeois historical conception."<sup>8</sup> Hence, separating and contrasting form and narrative (or idea) becomes indispensable.

The thought that reality can be shown in a "neutral" way, with as little distortion as possible, takes us back to the notion of realism, which could be obtained, for example, by long, maybe uninterrupted takes or deep focus. For Brunette, "[w]e perceive something as realistic when it corresponds to a set of conventionalized expectations (largely derived from previous film

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<sup>5</sup> Asensi, "Los modelos de mundo de Gus van Sant: *Elephant*".

<sup>6</sup> Manuel Asensi, *Crítica y sabotaje* (Barcelona: Anthropos Siglo XXI, 2011) 312.

<sup>7</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1. The Movement-Image* (London: The Athlone Press, 1986) 149.

<sup>8</sup> Deleuze 150.

or novelistic practice) about what people in movies do, not when it corresponds to actual empirical experience.”<sup>9</sup>

However, it should be pointed out that realism *per se* has not always had a stable definition and that its connotations have changed throughout the different periods of film history and film theory. Thus, for example, the common distinction between German expressionism and the North American realist films from the 1930s (with their fake sets, artificial light and dialogues) may now look expressionist as well.<sup>10</sup> Again, Foucault’s notion of “technology”<sup>11</sup> (1988) should be taken into account, *i. e.*, the ways in which cinema models or shapes the idea of reality, and, on the other hand, technology also taken in its other sense: as technical innovation, especially since at the present time images are not any more guarantee of visual truth. The question of referentiality I want to address relates significantly to Paul de Man’s following statement:

[the] critique of referential meaning [does not imply] that the referential function of language could in any way be avoided, bracketed, or reduced to being just one contingent linguistic property among others, as is postulated, for example, in contemporary semiology which, like all postkantian formalisms, could not exist without this postulate.<sup>12</sup>

The critique of referential meaning must take into account the process, the ways in which a text deals with its referents, since all texts depict a specific model of the world. It is therefore

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Brunette, *Roberto Rossellini* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) 58.

<sup>10</sup> Brunette 3. It should also be taken into account that any “realism” implies, among other aspects, reservations from a feminist or postcolonial perspective.

<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” *Technologies of the Self: a Seminar with Michel Foucault*, eds. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988). See also Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender. Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

<sup>12</sup> Paul De Man, *Allegories of Reading. Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) 207.

necessary to carefully evaluate the proceedings that have been followed in the construction of the text, identifying the discursive processes that take part in representation.

Again, for Brunette and Wills, “[p]artly because of the work of ‘realistic’ Hollywood films, which inculcate a certain pre-determined reality in the spectator, the work is seen as natural rather than constructed, and therefore beyond the reach of political change.”<sup>13</sup> Moreover, it has also lead to forget or omit the importance of issues such as race, power, nation, and gender. For example, Stam reflects:

does a film assume an interlocutor of a specific gender, class or nation? Does the film ignore the possible reactions of women or take them into account? Many mainstream films of the 50s gave the impression that there were no black people in America.<sup>14</sup>

Stam also states: “all films make specific assumptions about audience ideology and cultural preparation.”<sup>15</sup> In a similar vein, Hall remarks: “The practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write – the positions of *enunciation*.”<sup>16</sup>

*Amateur* (1979), also known as *Camera Buff*, is certainly a case of a self-reflexive film; nevertheless, my purpose here is to illustrate *how* the film exposes certain of these points in question offering a particular reading of it which sets out addressing its formal elements,

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<sup>13</sup> Brunette and Wills 17

<sup>14</sup> Stam 47

<sup>15</sup> Stam 47

<sup>16</sup> Hall 704.

especially since the film itself allows, among other things, a cinematic reflection on the prior issues that have been addressed<sup>17</sup>. According to Slavoj Žižek,

Kieślowski's first move was to fight false representation (the lack of an adequate image of social reality) in Polish cinema through documentaries; then he noticed that, *when you let go of false representation and directly approach reality, you lose reality itself*, so he abandoned [them] and moved into fiction.<sup>18</sup>

For Žižek, the “crucial intermediary in this passage” is precisely *Camera Buff*.<sup>19</sup> It must not be forgotten, on the other hand, that “[s]elf-reference of different kinds became an integral part in the stylistic arsenal of various European New Waves, itself reflected in turn by film theory.”<sup>20</sup>

Taking up some of Stephen Heath's observations, De Lauretis stated that particular films which directly address the notion of a supposed realism transfer to the spectator the question of the relations between a so called reality and its representation *within* their own filmic discourse. Signalling their difficulties and forcing the spectator to reflect upon them by means of their own articulation within representation, the films include the spectator's divided point of view, disturbing the coherence of identification by addressing a divided subject, “[t]hus, it is compellingly argued, the struggle is still with representation –not outside or against it– a struggle in the discourse of the film and on the film.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Given the impossibility of covering here all of the important aspects related to the film in question, I must endorse, nevertheless, the importance of the film's context, which is obviously paramount; how the film works and worked within its polysystem, to use Itamar Even-Zohar's terms. Notions such as industry, production, audience, language, gender, reception, among others, should be addressed. Did Kieślowski deny or confirm certain tradition or convention?, for example.

<sup>18</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears. Krzysztof Kieślowski between Theory and Post-Theory* (London: British Film Institute, 2001) 121.

<sup>19</sup> Žižek 72.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory. An Introduction through the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 2010) 56.

<sup>21</sup> Teresa De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't. Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) 28.

*Amateur* is, as Žižek describes it, “a *fiction* film about a *documentary* film-maker.”<sup>22</sup> It tells the story of Filip, a man from a small town, and the consequences of his acquisition of an 8 millimetre camera with the aim of filming his soon to be born daughter. Initially, the only meaning that the camera has for him is the possibility of capturing images of his family. He is unaware, in general, of any cinematographic principle. Hence, the film “begins with the birth of his daughter and of his identity as a filmmaker.”<sup>23</sup> When his boss learns that he owns a camera, he entrusts him to film the anniversary celebration of the plant where they work. He then wins a prize in a small film festival and subsequently creates, along with his colleagues, their own film club. He later gets hired by the television corporation to make small documentaries about his town. Filming becomes central to him and his wife leaves him. Subsequently, one of his films causes unexpected problems: his supervisor, and also friend, is forced to retire, so Filip decides to destroy one of his last films to avoid more problems. The film ends with a classical scene in which Filip takes his camera, turns it and films himself for the first time. By means of a close-up he then starts describing the first scene in *Amateur*, the night he took his wife to the hospital. For him “reality” now only makes sense through the camera lens.

According to Marek Haltof, “[t]he camera enables him to see more, to go beyond the facade of things and to grow as a person and as a political being.”<sup>24</sup> Consequently, Filip will state, almost at the end of the film, that “only nature can be shown as it really is”.

*Amateur* bears a reflection on filmmaking and on various cinematographic issues. As Annette Insdorf well states, we find an awareness of censorship, for example, beginning with his wife asking him not to film their baby when she is naked, the factory director who takes notes and tells Filip which scenes must be taken out from the film, etc. Likewise, when Filip is hired

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<sup>22</sup> Žižek 72.

<sup>23</sup> Annette Insdorf, *Double Lives, Second Chances. The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieslowski* (New York: Hyperion, 1999) 41.

<sup>24</sup> Marek Haltof, *The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieślowski. Variations on Destiny and Chance* (London: Wallflower Press, 2004) 42.

by the television company to make documentaries and one of the producers gives him film stock, Insdorf raises the question: “Then again, to whom does the film belong?”<sup>25</sup>

Filip’s relation to cinema changes over time: he progresses critically and technically and becomes interested in filming the injustice and inequality in his community. Hence, the contrast between his first film, the anniversary celebration, and his second, which focuses on the life of a disabled employee (with a more “complex” editing and the use of voice over), is evident. He becomes interested in filming “what people think and feel” and he shoots the employee’s unique life because “this is how it is”. But, most importantly, “Filip learns that there are political consequences to his choice of subject and angle.”<sup>26</sup>

The film puts into question the relation between cinema, as creator of subjectivities, and the representation of certain “objective reality”. A reflection by means of Filip’s changing understanding of the cinematographic phenomenon, which is also reflected during the meeting with filmmaker Krzysztof Zanussi, for example. The opposition fiction/reality is precisely what is being stressed in the last scene: Filip himself recounting his own personal story opposed to a reality outside himself which he would “objectively” depict with his camera. Would the film have been completely different if it had addressed Filip’s personal point of view?

Framing devices, which play an important role in the film as well as the play-within-a-play structure, also become significant. Numerous windows, crystals, reflections, frames and other films that appear throughout *Amateur* manage to accentuate and emphasize notions of reference and the very exact process of fiction. References to filmmakers such as Ken Loach, Karoly Makk, and Andrzej Wajda from whom Filip reads in Jerzy Płażewski’s *Film History for Everybody*, not to mention the continuous presence of the camera, of the recording sound

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<sup>25</sup> Insdorf 43.

<sup>26</sup> Insdorf 41.

throughout the film and the cinematic issues discussed by the characters, have similar effects. Certainly, it becomes also important to study *when* and *how* these fragments are inserted into the narrative.

In *Amateur* point of view is hardly ever shown from one of the characters, at least in the sense Edward Branigan defined the closed POV, which “has a high degree of narrative stability [and] serves to reestablish time and place and what we've seen [signalling] the end of a ‘subjective’ view.”<sup>27</sup> Even though Filip is the main character, things are not seen from his personal point of view or through his camera; on the contrary, he is constantly portrayed *with* his camera, filming.

Editing and camera movement favour short, direct, informative scenes; as a result, the camera is apparently seen as more “objective”. During conversations between characters the camera seldom uses shot/reverse shots or eyeline-matched reverse shots, but tends to show characters together inside the frame. In most of the cases they are over-the-shoulder medium shots. The camera usually follows characters around or captures movement inside the frames, which are usually filled with people: the camera is just another witness there. Sequences usually begin with close-ups or with people entering, usually walking, into the establishing shot, as if spaces were not important at all. Dialogues, gestures and body language become more important, showing them in close, medium shots, rather than in deep focus, which is rare, or in more “complex staging”. There is, for example, no cross-cutting in the entire film, which centres only in Filip and on what he is doing at the moment.

Thus, the idea that certain techniques can be more directly related to certain genres, such as deep focus with realism, compared to quick cuts, for example, becomes unstable. Nowadays, as Brunette remarks, long-take sequences, for example, are highly abnormal, since they are not

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<sup>27</sup> Edward Branigan, “Formal Permutations of the Point-of-View Shot,” *Screen* 16.3 (1975): 60.

so common anymore in mainstream cinema; thus, “it is more often perceived as unrealistic because it calls attention to itself in a Brechtian manner, thus disturbing the illusion upon which all realism depends.”<sup>28</sup>

Camera movement is for David Bordwell one of the most difficult areas for critical analysis.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, it should be addressed within each film’s own framework and contexts. *Amateur* reminds us of Filip’s own films: straight, direct cutting, hand held camera moving around and following people, very few shot/reverse shots tending more to place everyone inside the frame, irrelevance of sets and locations, etc. Interestingly, we see through Filip’s camera only twice: by means of a zoom (when he is explaining to his friend and collaborator how the technique works), and Filip’s own close-up in the end, which seems to relate to the notion of fiction, since once he turns on the camera to film himself he immediately starts to “tell a story”.

Thus, the film denounces the idea that any “representation of reality” is as simple as that, especially since Filip’s films bring forth a difference between his “intentions” (to show “what things are like in our plant”, for example), their reception, and their social and political consequences (just as any other “representation” would do). The correspondence between Filip’s and Kieślowski’s camera, to put it in very broad terms, exemplifies precisely this idea.

It has been the contention of this work to offer a general framework of film representation in relation to film analysis reconsidering the importance of taking into account a formal approach. As Stam points out: “Filmic texts dramatize and enact their relation to social power not only through theme and ‘image’ but also through their critical relation to the structures of discursive authority as mediated by the formal parameters of the text.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Brunette and Wills 160.

<sup>29</sup> David Bordwell, “Camera Movement and Cinematic Space,” *Explorations in Film Theory. Selected Essays from Ciné-Tracts*, ed. Ron Burnett (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991) 229.

<sup>30</sup> Stam 105.



## EXPLORATION, INVENTION AND IMAGINATION: THE MYTH OF ICARUS IN ANDRÉ BAZIN

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**Abstract:** In this essay, I intend to elucidate the ontological implications of André Bazin's integral realism: "a recreation of the world in its own image." The connection that he draws between the world and the image is in harmony with his mythical project for cinema, which argues that an imaginative myth of "total cinema" preceded its actual invention and thus moves beyond technological determinism. I argue that, while Narcissus has been named the inventor of painting (Damisch), Bazin considers the myth of Icarus to prefigure the invention of cinema. Moreover, the fact that his most elaborate explication of the figure of Icarus occurs in his work on exploration cinema (especially Cousteau's *Le monde de silence*) is not coincidental. As I will argue, his view of cinema as an art of reality, i.e. his ontology-thesis, indeed solidifies in his straightforward admiration for the post-war "grand film de voyage," a genre in which Bazin saw the return of a documentary authenticity of photographic cinema.

In his seminal work "The Myth of Total Cinema" (1946) André Bazin approaches film through the framework of its inimitable association with the world, developing his understanding of what he terms "integral realism" [*réalisme intégral*] as the ontology of the cinematographic image. The essay challenges contemporary film histories, notably Georges Sadoul's first volume of *Histoire générale du cinéma* that deals specifically with the pioneers of film and the invention of cinema.<sup>1</sup> He counters technologically determinist film history, which he opposes to his own mythical view on the origins of film:

The guiding myth of the invention of cinema is thus that it will accomplish the dominant myth of every nineteenth-century technology for reproducing reality, from photography

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<sup>1</sup> Originally published in *Critique* as a book review of Sadoul's *L'Invention du cinéma 1832-1897*, the essay announces Bazin's particular interest in cinema books and his certain aversion to prescriptive, exhaustive film histories, which is one of the major methodological standpoints following from his practice of film criticism. Moreover, Bazin's notion of "total cinema" is entirely taken from René Barjavel's *Cinéma total: essai sur les formes futures du Cinéma* (1944), in which he condemns the dismissal of sound cinema by several silent film theorists as "intellectual laziness."

to the phonograph: a complete realism, the recreation of the world in its own image - an image upon which the irreversibility of time and the artist's interpretation do not weigh.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, from his introduction to *What Is Cinema?* (1958) he describes this ontology in lay terminology, stating emphatically that cinema is the art of reality: "in less philosophical terms: cinema as the art of reality."<sup>3</sup> In this paper, I hope to provide a contemporary examination of cinema as an art of reality: I intend to explain the ways in which Bazin understands the relation between the world and its image, and towards this end I will look at several references in Bazin's writing that are either theological, mythological or scientific. I will then discuss his notion of integral realism against the background of several texts on exploration film, wherein he develops the analogy between cinema and one particular mythical image which I see as a guiding principle in his approach to this art of reality: the myth of Icarus.

Bazin is not the first to take recourse to a mythical paradigm in an argument against a prematurely proclaimed decadence of art. Centuries before him, Alberti took on a similar challenge applied to painting, by circumstantially crediting Narcissus for the invention of painting: "[...] I had the habit of telling my friends that the inventor of painting, according to the poets, was Narcissus."<sup>4</sup> In "The Inventor of Painting" (2010), Hubert Damisch further elaborates on Alberti's claim, as he assigns to the myth of Narcissus a similar methodological purpose:

Alberti is not interested in the *historical* origins of painting. [...] the fable of Narcissus [...] is only invoked in *De Pictura* for theoretical reasons, and not for narrative or picturesque purposes. Alberti had little concern to know when and where painting

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<sup>2</sup> André Bazin (1946), "The Myth of Total Cinema," *What Is Cinema?*, trans. Timothy Barnard (Montreal: Caboose, 2009) 17. For all citations in this paper from "The Myth of Total Cinema" and "Ontology of the Photographic Image" I follow Timothy Barnard's translation; passages from other essays are my translation.

<sup>3</sup> André Bazin (1958), "Avant-propos," *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma? Tome 1: Ontologie et langage* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1959) 9.

<sup>4</sup> Alberti, *De pictura* (1435), cited in Hubert Damisch, "The Inventor of Painting," *Oxford Art Journal* 33.3 (2010): 306.

appeared for the first time, and did not much care to have empirical evidence of its beginnings or to learn of its first concrete developments. What mattered to him was to expose what this art consisted of and to offer a working definition of it to painters.<sup>5</sup>

Though Alberti's critical method was inherently prescriptive and in so being can be said to differ from Bazin's, the myth-paradigm functions in both cases as a critique to the historical approach.<sup>6</sup> We know that Bazin rejects a technologically determinist framework, and it is the combination of the exploratory spirit and the subsidiary role of technology which inspires him to view not Narcissus, but Icarus as the inventor of cinema.

### *The Graven Image of Exploration Film*

Bazin's repeated reference to exploration films like *Kon-Tiki* (Thor Heyerdahl, 1950) and *Victoire sur l'Annapurna* (Marcel Ichac, 1953) reflects their importance in his body of critical work. Especially striking is the fact that in both cases Bazin praises the pictorial imperfection: *Kon-Tiki* is "the most beautiful film, but it does not exist!"<sup>7</sup> because "its imperfections testify to its authenticity, the absent documents are the negative imprint of adventure, its inscription in relief."<sup>8</sup> Such apophatic reasoning indeed pervades his thought process. In *Le Sommeil*

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<sup>5</sup> Damisch 309.

<sup>6</sup> According to Damisch, Alberti's *De pictura* was intended to be prescriptive rather than historical: "Alberti had little concern to know when and where painting appeared for the first time, and did not much care to have empirical evidence of its beginnings or to learn of its first concrete developments. [...] Alberti does not write *on* painting: he endeavors to produce an "art" or, as [Erwin] Panofsky accurately translated it, a "theory," which would be useful for painters who were his audience" (Damisch 309).

Bazin's myth of total cinema is motivated by an aversion to encyclopedic and exhaustive film histories comparable to Alberti's; the latter's intention to compose a working definition of painting, furthermore, is reminiscent of Bazin's views of film criticism as symbiotic with filmmaking. See for instance: André Bazin, "Réflexions sur la critique," *Cinéma: revue de la fédération des ciné clubs* 32 (1958): 91–96.

<sup>7</sup> André Bazin (1953-1954), "Le Cinéma et l'exploration," *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2008) 31.

<sup>8</sup> Bazin (1953-1954) 34.

*paradoxale: écrits sur André Bazin* (2014), for instance, Hervé Joubert-Laurencin writes on the topic that:

In Bazin's writing, the work of the negative, which departs from so-called "objective" resemblance and opens onto dissemblance, starts out with his "paradoxes, reverse side of contradiction," and ends in his film analyses and the theses he derives from them [My translation].<sup>9</sup>

A similar train of thought concludes Bazin's discussion of *Victoire sur l'Annapurna*, in which mountaineers Maurice Herzog and his companion Louis Lachenal document their climb of the 8000 meters high peak of the Annapurna. The expedition pushed the limits of human endurance: due to frostbite, both climbers lost their toes and Herzog, because he had lost his gloves on the way, his fingers as well as his camera in the midst of an avalanche. Again, Bazin understands cinematic testimony through the lack of documentation:

Of this climb in the hell of ice, the modern Orpheus has not even been able to save his camera's glance. But then the long road to Cavalry, which is the descent, starts: Herzog and Lachenal tied up like mummies on the back of their Sherpas. And this time cinema is there, Veronica's veil on the face of human suffering.<sup>10</sup>

In this remarkable passage, Bazin first views the extreme challenges faced by Herzog and Lachenal against a mythical referent: in absence of a camera, we are like Orpheus deprived from looking back. In their physical suffering, Bazin sees parallels between their descent and the stations of the cross, as he takes on one of his many references to Christian relics: in this case,

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<sup>9</sup> Hervé Joubert-Laurencin, *Le Sommeil paradoxal : écrits sur André Bazin* (Montreuil: Les Éditions de l'Oeil, 2014) 45.

<sup>10</sup> Bazin (1953-1954) 34.

between the cinema screen and Veronica's veil.<sup>11</sup> On other occasions he relates the cinematographic image to the simple cloak of reality,<sup>12</sup> alluding to the robe worn by Christ during the crucifixion, or he includes a photographic print of the shroud of Turin, allegedly Christ's burial cloth, in the opening essay of *What Is Cinema?* (1958).

Bazin himself is rather brief in his explication of the shroud in the ontology-essay, but his affirmation in a footnote that it "achieves a synthesis of the relic and the photograph,"<sup>13</sup> explains clearly the importance of such an image within the ontology argument. Regardless of the controversy surrounding to the shroud's spiritual significance, this particular cloth and the image cult it implies nevertheless became historically and materially entangled with the medium of photography.<sup>14</sup> Specifically relating to the shroud in Bazin, Dudley Andrew writes:

And so the fetish (the photograph) of a literal fetish (the shroud), serves as a kind of blessing for Bazin's four-volume project. But it's a mixed blessing, so to speak, for by 1958 everyone knew the shroud to be fake and the photograph only a document of a hoax, or at

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<sup>11</sup> He repeats the analogy between the scene of Christ's suffering and cinema in his discussion of *Journal d'un curé de campagne* (Robert Bresson, 1954): "It is perhaps not useless to signal the Christ like analogies that abound at the end of the film, because they have reasons to go unnoticed. Thus the priest faints twice in the night: he falls in mud, vomits wine and blood (here one finds in a synthesis of staggering metaphors with Christ falling, the blood of the Passion, the Holy Sponge and the stains from spit combined). Even more: Veronica's veil, Séraphita's cloth; and finally, death in the garret, bizarre Golgotha complete with the penitent and the impenitent thief" (André Bazin (1951), "*Le Journal d'un curé de campagne* et la stylistique de Robert Bresson," *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2008) 118).

<sup>12</sup> André Bazin (1952), "The French Renoir," *Jean Renoir*, trans. W.W. Halsey II and William H. Simon (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1973) 90-91.

<sup>13</sup> André Bazin (1945), "Ontology of the Photographic Image," *What Is Cinema?* trans. Timothy Barnard (Montreal: Caboose, 2009) 12.

<sup>14</sup> Several scholars have written about the shroud and its relation to visual culture. In her book *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary* (2004), Marie-José Mondzain, for instance, discusses the shroud within the history of photography; and Georges Didi-Huberman analyzes the discourse around this enigmatic image in his work on the imprint and its relation to dissemblance, which shows remarkable similarities with Bazin's ontology-argument (see: Georges Didi-Huberman, "The Index of the Absent Wound (Monograph on a Stain)," trans. Thomas Repensek, *October* 29 (1984): 63-8.

least of a wild superstition. What could Bazin have had in mind in suggesting or permitting such an image to color our reading?<sup>15</sup>

As Andrew affirms, Bazin's motivation for including this print in *What Is Cinema?* exceeds the blind acceptance of a religious hoax. Rather than viewing Bazin's reference influenced by an irreverent aftermath of carbon-dating procedures, however, it is historically more accurate to understand this enigmatic reference in light of its contemporaneous discourse surrounding the shroud that was, in Bazin's days, often spiritually motivated, such as *Toi qui es-tu?* by Paul Claudel (1936), a text with which Bazin might in fact have been familiar.<sup>16</sup> About the photographed shroud, Claudel writes:

More than an image, it is a presence! [...] More than a presence, it is a photograph [...] For a photograph is not a portrait made by human hand. It is difficult to believe that this detailed, negative impression of Christ's body [...] is *a phenomenon that is purely natural*.<sup>17</sup>

In the Ontology-essay, Bazin clearly addresses the non-artifactual nature of the photographic image:

All art is founded upon human agency [*la présence de l'homme*], but in photography alone can we celebrate its absence. Photography has an effect upon us of a natural phenomenon, like a flower or a snowflake whose beauty is inseparable from its earthly origin.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is!* (West-Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) 138.

<sup>16</sup> Joubert-Laurencin 135. Though carbon-dating had been possible since 1946, it was performed on the shroud no sooner than 1988. For more on the carbon-dating results, see: Damon et al. "Radiocarbon Dating of the Shroud of Turin," *Nature* 337.16 (1989).

<sup>17</sup> Paul Claudel, cited in Marie-José Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*, trans. Rico Franses (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004) 199-200.

<sup>18</sup> Bazin (1945) 13.

Bazin never delves into the spiritual aspect of the shroud's origins, but rather points to its shared ontogeny with the photographic image, and in no way mounts an apology for the authenticity of the shroud. Instead, he appears to make a more modest claim: photography is a "natural phenomenon" created in absence of human agency, and the shroud of Turin functions in the ontology argument as its iconic precedent. Where Claudel's devout catholicism pervades his reception of the shroud as not merely a natural phenomenon and thereby hints at the divine ("It is difficult to believe that [it] is a phenomenon that is purely natural"), Bazin is without a doubt less pious in his argument on the psychological power of relics in relation to photography: he stresses the *natural* creation rather than the divine, and correspondingly steps away from an "anthropocentric utilitarianism" of the painted portrait:

The production of images has even dispensed with any notion of anthropocentric usefulness. It is no longer the question of the individual's survival, but more generally of creating an ideal universe in the image of reality, endowed with an independent temporal destiny.<sup>19</sup>

Bazin thus appears to have a very specific reason for including the photograph: we can now confirm that the implied connection between the shroud of Turin and the medium of photography lies precisely in the particular genesis of the image as *acheiropoieton*, i.e. an image, like the Veronica or the shroud, that is not made with human hands.

Bazin deepens the analogy between the biblical discourse on images in his description of the myth of cinema, which he formulates as a retake of the *imago dei* into an exposé on integral realism: corresponding to a departure from anthropocentrism ("God created mankind in His own image," Genesis 1:27), cinema is the "recreation the world in its own image."<sup>20</sup> From this

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<sup>19</sup> Bazin (1945) 4.

<sup>20</sup> Bazin (1946) 17.

perspective, the Ontology-argument then announces a New Testament, so to speak: as a natural image it is redeemed from perspective, which Bazin condemned as “the original sin of Western painting.”<sup>21</sup> As I will argue subsequently, Bazin’s discourse on the natural image of cinema combined with his interest in exploration film invokes the biblical theme of idolatry and the Old Testament embargo on “graven images,” which reads:

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.  
(Exodus 20:4)

Bazin explicitly charges cinema with the task of recreating, precisely, the world in its image, which explicates the importance of the theme of exploration in his oeuvre. In this manner, but from a philosophical point of view, Tom Gunning understands the myth of total cinema against the “expansive” background of the world:

The worldhood of the world forms the ultimate referent of the myth of total cinema. Thus total cinema does not posit a Hegelian universal totality but rather the phenomenological image of the world as bounded by a horizon, and it is in the nature of a horizon to be expanded.<sup>22</sup>

In exploration films like *Kon-Tiki* and *Victoire sur l’Annapurna* Bazin saw the reconciliation of reality, or the world, with its image, and his essays on the topic of exploration film are therefore fully in line with the ontological argument as well as his myth of total cinema, which we could now carefully call the myth of the graven image. In his review of Jacques-Yves Cousteau and

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<sup>21</sup> Bazin (1945) 6.

<sup>22</sup> Tom Gunning, “The World in its Own Image: The Myth of Total Cinema,” *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film theory and Its Aftermath*, eds. Dudley Andrew, Hervé Joubert-Laurencin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 125.



Louis Malle's *Le Monde du silence* (1956), Bazin most clearly describes the evolution of film in a direct analogy with human exploration:

[...] this magnificence, indeed, is ineffable and [...] constitutes the greatest revelation that our little planet has made to man since the heroic age of terrestrial exploration. We can also observe that for the same reason, underwater films are the only radical innovation in documentary film since the great travel films of the 20s and 30s.<sup>23</sup>

The linkage between cinema, the graven image and human exploration is ongoing throughout Bazin's oeuvre: after having explored *the earth beneath*, the great voyage films of the 20s and 30s, Bazin praises the new discoveries of Cousteau and Malle in *the water under the earth*.

### ***Icarus and the Invention of Cinema***

In "The Myth of Total Cinema," we see this argument developed from a technological point of view. These technologies which enable the continuation of human exploration, namely ships, U-boats and so-called "frogmen," but also more recently airplanes and space rockets, could arguably be attributed to an imperialist and cruel combat-machine, which would draw parallels between cinema and war (or cinema and imperialism).<sup>24</sup> But Bazin clearly distances himself from such an approach, and argues that cinema partakes in a much more ancient myth of human flight, namely the myth of Icarus:

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<sup>23</sup> André Bazin, "Le Monde du silence" (*France Observateur*, 1/03/1956) n.p.

<sup>24</sup> See primarily Paul Virilio's *War and Cinema: Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 1989), in particular his chapter entitled "Cinema Isn't I See, It's I Fly" in which he argues that "Since the battlefield has always been a field of perception, the war machine appears to the military commander as an instrument of representation, comparable to the painter's palette and brush. [...] *For men at war, the function of the weapon is the function of the eye.* It is therefore quite understandable that, after 1914, the air arm's violent cinematic disruption of the space continuum, together with the lighting advances of military technology, should have literally exploded the old homogeneity of vision and replaced it with the heterogeneity of perceptual fields [original emphasis]" (Virilio 20). While industry often shows itself particularly interested in warfare, the myth of Icarus in Bazin's writing posits a radically different view on the origins of cinema as combining a technological invention with an age-old dream of human flight.

Of course, other examples of the convergence of research could be found in the history of technology and inventions, but we must distinguish those which are, precisely, the product of scientific advances and industrial (or military) needs from those which clearly precede these advances. The ancient myth of Icarus had to wait the internal combustion engine before descending from Plato's higher world, but this myth has been present in every human being since we began to observe birds.<sup>25</sup>

Bazin's mention of the myth of Icarus in this passage is anything but anecdotal, and indeed in itself crystallizes his ontological project. Portrayed here as preceding the antiheroes of a technological *invention* driven either by financial profit (Lumière and Edison) or scientific achievement (Marey et al.), Bazin places Icarus among those "fanatics, the maniacs, the disinterested pioneers" who had first *imagined* cinema.<sup>26</sup> Bazin's choice for the history of aviation speaks for itself, as it is a history of trial but mostly error, including "bird-men," tower jumping, and strap-on wings. Not only did these attempts to defy gravity precede their development as war-technologies, but they were indeed driven by a similar imaginative force, on which Blaise Pascal, whose *Pensées* directly inform Bazin's Ontology-argument, wrote:

It is that deceitful part in man, that mistress of error and falsity, the more deceptive that she is not always so; for she would be an infallible rule of truth, if she were an infallible rule of falsehood. But being most generally false, she gives no sign of her nature, impressing the same character on the true and the false. I do not speak of fools, I speak of the wisest men; and it is among them that the imagination has the great gift of persuasion. Reason protests in vain; it cannot set a true value on things.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Bazin (1946) 18.

<sup>26</sup> Bazin (1946) 18.

<sup>27</sup> Blaise Pascal (1657-1658), *Pascal's Pensées*, trans. W.F. Trotter (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1958) 24.

Cinema, then, is not so much the story of Daedalus, the inventor of the wax wings: “Niépce, Muybridge, Leroy, Joly, Demeny and Louis Lumière himself were obsessive eccentrics, handymen or, at best, clever industrialists.”<sup>28</sup> Instead, the invention of cinema lies in the audacity of Icarus, who against his father’s advice flew too close to the sun which melted his wings. The story of Icarus symbolizes the blind courage of fanatics, “neither industrialists nor great thinkers, but men with imagination,”<sup>29</sup> or, explorers such as Heyerdahl, Herzog and Lachenal who each in their own way took a giant leap for mankind. Faced with almost inhumane conditions, such as the lack of oxygen and extreme frostbite, that announce what mountaineers call the “death zone” beyond 8000 meters, their journey on the Annapurna pushed the limits of human exploration to a new height, after which Herzog famously exclaimed that “there are other Annapurnas in the lives of men!”

### **“Underwater Icarus:” Freed from Terrestrial Chains**

It is ultimately in *Le Monde du silence* that Bazin then sees the fulfillment of his anecdotal mention of Icarus in “The Myth of Total Cinema,” as the film’s aesthetics derive from “the satisfaction of an age-old human desire: defying gravity. It could be that the dream of Icarus began with his plunge unto the ocean. The sky was at our feet; it starts to reveal its marvels to us.”<sup>30</sup> However, Bazin does not do away with technology completely. His argument is less straightforward: while bulky airplanes eventually enabled a certain freedom of terrestrial chains, it is in the ocean that man, finally, “flies with his arms.”

I’m only indicating that it is not a matter of symbolism attached to the surface of the water, changing, streaming, lustral, but of the ocean: water considered as another half of

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<sup>28</sup> Bazin (1946) 13.

<sup>29</sup> Bazin, (1946) 18.

<sup>30</sup> André Bazin, “*Le Monde du silence: Icare sous-marin*” (*Radio cinéma télévision*, 26/02/1956) 44.

the universe, a three dimensional environment, more stable and homogeneous, moreover, than the air and of which its envelopment frees us from gravity. This liberation of terrestrial chains is just as well symbolized by fish as it is by birds, but traditionally, and for obvious reasons, the dream of mankind unfurled barely in the sky. Dry, solar, aerial. The sea shimmering with light was to the Mediterranean poet but a tranquil roof where doves walk, the roof of the jibs and not the one of the seals. [*“La mer scintillante de lumière n’était au poète méditerranéen qu’un toit tranquille où marchent les colombes, celui des focs et non des phoques.”*]

Ultimately it is science stronger than our imagination that should, by revealing to mankind its virtuality as a fish, realize the old myth of flight, which is much better fulfilled by the scuba set than by the noisy and massive mechanism of the airplane, which is as stupid as a submarine and as dangerous as a standard diving dress with a hose and a helmet.<sup>31</sup>

The scuba set, for instance, was one of many inventions that came from the world’s first diving club *Les Sous l’eau* (pun intended), founded by biologist and filmmaker Jean Painlevé (1902-1989), whose father, Paul Painlevé’s scientific work both on fluid mechanics and aviation<sup>32</sup> might have fueled the filmmaker’s outspoken admiration for the subaquatic universe. In order to accommodate his continued underwater exploration alongside his insatiable scientific curiosity, technology was indeed indispensable. In “Le Cinéma Scientifique” (1955), for instance, Painlevé

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<sup>31</sup> Bazin (1956) n.p. Bazin here references the symbolist poet Paul Valéry’s *Le Cimetière marin*, around which he in fact structures his critique of *Le Monde du silence*. On the importance of this particular poem in Bazin’s film criticism, see: Blandine Joret, “Today, Icarus: On the Persistence of André Bazin’s Myth of Total Cinema” [PhD dissertation] (University of Amsterdam, 2015) <<http://hdl.handle.net/11245/1.478548>>.

<sup>32</sup> Brigitte Berg, “Contradictory Forces: Jean Painlevé, 1902-1989,” *Science Is Film: The Films of Jean Painlevé*, eds. Andy Masaki Bellows, Marina McDougall and Brigitte Berg (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000) 27. Paul Painlevé (1863-1933) was a mathematician and acclaimed scientist, known for his excellent work in solving differential equations that would inform his interest in mechanics as well as his study of human flight. He also accompanied Wilbur Wright on his first passenger-flight and became France’s first minister of aviation (Berg, 5).

praises high-speed filming, magnetic sound recording, and filmed radioscopy;<sup>33</sup> and in “Les Pieds dans l’eau” (1935) he writes that “whatever improvements had been made were quickly canceled out by new needs. Just like airplanes, the cameras we construct are obsolete the moment we try to use them.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Bazin claims that technology does not determine what cinema is (our desire for flight existed the moment we first observed birds), technological innovations do provide further advancements toward the gradual fulfillment of this desire, often in an almost counter-intuitive, accidental manner (under water, not through the air). In Bazin’s words. “[...] every change of real importance, which enrich our cinematic heritage, is closely tied to technology. Technology is cinema’s infrastructure.”<sup>35</sup>

### ***On Other Annapurnas!***

What matters more is the probable outlook on new knowledge and new technological possibilities, the courage and the personal virtues of Gagarin, science that has enabled this achievement and everything this, in turn, assumes from a selfless and sacrificial mindset. But that which, perhaps, matters above all is to have left Place. For one hour, a man has existed outside any horizon - everything was sky around him, or more precisely, everything was geometrical space. A man existed in the absolute of homogenous space.<sup>36</sup>

With these memorable words, Emmanuel Lévinas applauds technological advancement alongside human recklessness against the background of a launching space age. As I have argued, these three elements combined, namely exploration, audacity and technological progress,

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<sup>33</sup> See: Jean Painlevé, “Scientific Film,” trans. Janine Herman. *Science Is Film: The Films of Jean Painlevé*, eds. Andy Masaki Bellows, Marina McDougall and Brigitte Berg (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000) 160-169.

<sup>34</sup> Jean Painlevé (1935), “Feet In the Water,” trans. Janine Herman. In: *Science Is Film: The Films of Jean Painlevé*. eds. Andy Masaki Bellows, Marina McDougall and Brigitte Berg (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000) 138.

<sup>35</sup> André Bazin (1948), “William Wyler, the Jansenist of Mise en Scène,” *What Is Cinema?*, trans. Timothy Barnard (Montreal: Caboose, 2009) 53.

<sup>36</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas, “Heidegger, Gagarine et nous,” *Difficile liberté. Essais sur le judaïsme, deuxième édition refondue et complétée* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1976) 301.

are equally constructive of Bazin's myth of total cinema as well. From a film historical point of view, then, Bazin's myth of total cinema agrees to a similar orientation toward technology, which accounts for the prescience of his myth of Icarus in contemporary cinema: facing new challenges "on other Annapurnas" beyond the safe haven of the earth's atmosphere.

Bazin died only a couple of years prior to Yuri Gagarin's legendary orbit around the earth in 1961, which in many ways exemplifies both the audacity and the exploratory spirit which inspires cinema's invention. But he wrote "The Myth of Total Cinema" against the backdrop of a very specific unmanned space-mission in the aftermath of the Second World War that finally included *the heavens above* into the camera's reach. More precisely, on 26 October 1946 a V2 rocket successfully captured approximately 1.600.000 square miles of the earth's curvature on 35 mm film, this very rocket which was originally designed by German scientists as an instrument of war to target cities such as London, Antwerp and Liège.<sup>37</sup> After this rocket film, even at this early stage space exploration was evincing influence from Bazin's Icarian myth, as seen, first, in a robotic photograph of the crescent of earth, followed by the famed "earth-rise" color picture and the most widely distributed photograph in existence, nicknamed the "blue marble." From Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), at the time of release a remarkably accurate science-fiction film, to the three dimensional spectacle of *Gravity* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2013):<sup>38</sup> the heavens above now fully partake in our imagination.

To return to the context of documentary and exploration film, which has been our point of entry into Bazin's myth of total cinema, I want to conclude this essay with an image from Andrei Ujica's *Out of the Present* (1999), a documentary made with found footage shot by cosmonauts

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<sup>37</sup> For original footage of the V2 rocket, see: "V2 Camera Views of Earth, 1946," *Air and Space Magazine* (November 2006) <<http://www.airspacemag.com/videos/category/space-exploration/v2-camera-views-of-earth1946/?no-ist#ooid=1tbjYyMTqS88mcv-3HLuHi2xXFw9oG38>>

<sup>38</sup> Already in 1952, Bazin praised 3D technology, when he wrote that "[...] relief lends itself [...] to an equally concerted and in fact artistic use as 'flat' cinema. Let us thus cheerfully take this new and decisive step towards a total cinema" (André Bazin, "Un nouveau stade du cinéma en relief: Le relief en équations" (*Radio cinéma télévision*, 20/07/1952) 5).

Sergei Krikalev and Anatoli Artsebarski on one of their missions in outer space. Their return to earth after 310 days in space shows remarkable parallels with Herzog's descent: practically paralyzed due to muscle atrophy, they are pulled out of their capsule like rag dolls and carried around in portable hospital chairs. When a Soviet officer wipes Krikalev's forehead, the circle is complete: decades after Bazin, here again, "cinema is there, Veronica's veil on the face of human suffering."<sup>39</sup>



Fig. 1: Still from *Out of the Present* (Andrei Ujica, 1999)

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<sup>39</sup> Bazin (1953-1954), 34.

# THE MOTION IMAGE AS THE *LOCUM TENENS* OF THE FILM. AN ONTOLOGICAL ENQUIRY ON THE ABSENCE OF THE NATURAL RULES

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An ontological enquiry on the motion image requires a clarification of the multiple instances that such an image has. Albeit, an understanding of its instances means a clarification for the role that the motion image plays in visual art. For this reason, in this paper I propose to show in which circumstances we can talk about the photographic image as a *locum tenens* of the reality that photography and film bears: the motion image as a *locum tenens* shows a reality that can function only through its multiple instances.

The photographic image leads to an ideal world in the likeness of the real, whereas movement enhances the motion image. The ideality of the new cinematic works is feasible only through the absence of the artist: this is the absence that makes possible the transposition of reality from the object to its reproduction. The motion image is not an *Ersatz* as Bazin understands it, but a *Leben* of the reality. For this reason the image is a self-reflection; the object is confused with the image itself. Finally, the image is the *locum tenens* of reality, a place where time and space does not respect anymore the normal rules.

There is a very interpretable history of the theories that wants to demonstrate the connection or even the identification of the motion image with reality. Without any doubt, the motion image has a unique mode of being longing to reflect the reality: this could be put in Heidegger's terms as the relationship between the Being and the beings; the Being is a self-showing of objects in luminous appearance<sup>1</sup>. However, my intention is not to develop a theory of the experience of cinema but to entail an analysis on the duality between the moving image and reality. What is the reality of the motion image? In this context, my intention is to show in which condition the moving image discloses the reality of the film. If Bazin is right in his affirmation, that the image is the object and the object is the image then, in the case of the film the moving image is the reality of the film whereas the reality of the film is the moving image without any natural laws. Since the external reality can be defined only under the natural laws, and we have

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<sup>1</sup> See: Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (New York: Viking Press, 1971).



no reason to believe that the reality of the film is the same with the external reality but, maybe, a part of it.

From the beginning our analysis requires a clear understanding of the motion image: this implies a distinction between image as representation and image as image-in-itself. The first type of image is a subject of historical hermeneutics that implies the relation between the subject, object, and representation. As a material entity, the image-in-itself opens the dialectics of the film. This distinction enforces Benjamin's idea of mechanical reproduction that puts forward a different ontological basis for image: the mechanical reproduction of the image marks the death of the aura in the classical works of art. Hence, the moving image of the cinema leads to the singularity of the film and eliminates the *aura*. On the same idea, Jean Baudrillard believes that though the moving image, seen as a signifier, the signified is destroyed and, consequently, the reality itself. The film enters in the space of the simulacrum. With this parallels we can say that the motion image is understood as an effect of the artworks and not of the nature. Then, if the motion image is made out of objects, or out of a visual array (visual field, image) then its reality or nature must be different from the external reality. Having this in mind, the aim of the paper is to show what type of reality has the motion image. I will start my investigation from the ontology of the photographic image by André Bazin.

## 1. Introduction

In the contemporary art the film has taken an important role, as the finest art that brings together, under a singular art-form, a multitude of art-forms. The film presents different features that are identical with those of painting, photography, film, or music. In this context a question arises: what is the role of the motion image in the film and what kind of ontological ground has this image? The uniqueness of the motion image is its power to represent continuous movement when is projected at a proper speed, e.g., 16 frames per second for silent films and 24 frames per second for sound film. The movement is possible due to the optical phenomena known as

persistence of vision and the *phi* phenomenon: the first causes the brain to retain images cast upon the retina of the eye for a fraction of second beyond their disappearance from the field of sight, while the latter creates apparent movement between images when they succeed one another rapidly. However, in lack of the electrodes in the brain, we can think images in terms of pure effects and affects that are set in motion by complex interplay between body and brain, perception and memory. This leads to a complex ontological structure between subject, image, and reality. The image (photographic or cinematic) is thought in terms of reality; especially the cinematic image which is described by the term of *fidelity* (to reality). Thus, the ontological status of the motion image must be revealed in comparison with what we understand by the world *reality*.

Both, the film and the photography have dissimilar instances that make possible multiple locations where we can experience them simultaneously. In this way the film and photography are close to the musical and literature works. Though, the experience of arts requires a human activity: the music requires reading, the literary work requires reading, and the film requires seeing. The multiple-art forms of film are bound to our senses that define the ontological instances of the film. One of the film's instances is the motion image. Hence, the understanding of the moving image implies the understanding of the film. But the cinematic image has a unique way of existence, underlined by its movement and, occasionally, melody, which gives it a special functionality. Hence, the motion image presents itself a myriad of ontological instances. The nature of this type of image is different from, for example, the image of a painting defined by motionlessness. It can be that the instances of the image make possible the film to be an art object with multiple forms. The question now is what kind of reality that the motion image has.

Due the multiple forms of art that the film enhances, we can say that the film appeals to every method of art to offer an ideal reality, or a reality defined by likeness to the external reality. Since the film is a mechanical reproduction, we can say that the film does not respect any natural

laws, but artificial laws. Hence, the motion image represents a reality and not presents *the* reality. But the reality of the image is a part of the external reality, as an apple is a fruit of a tree and not the tree itself. Thus, the reality of the motion image is a *locum tenens* of the external reality.

## 2. Bazin's Conception on Photographic Image and the Image as *Locum Tenens*

The film tends to expose the reality through the power of the image, thus Bazin thinks of two possibilities by which the image is connected with reality. Firstly, Bazin develops a reality of the film starting from the ontology of the photographic image. Secondly, Bazin introduces a variety of styles by which the realism can be interpreted. An understanding of the moving image implies a definition of the realism of the film. The image is put either in opposition or in a relation to visual or physical reality. Yet, this not implies that all films can be realist since Bazin considers the German expressionism and Soviet cinema as not being realistic. To define the realism we must go to the ontology of the photographic image which outcomes a tension between style and reality. This is why Bazin says in his effort to define reality or the style of the film it is always necessary to go to the “paradox of the cinema [which] is rooted in the dialect of concrete and abstraction”, because “if cinema is committed to communicate only by way of what is real, it becomes all the more important to discern those elements in filming which confirm our sense of natural reality and those which destroy that feeling.”<sup>2</sup>

From the beginning, we must underline that the term *realism* has no absolute and clear meaning. The need of reality itself does not mean anything, yet the value of the moving image stands in its fidelity to what it represents. Maybe this is way for Bazin cinema holds a new form of realism, the *plastic realism*. The term of *plastic* is a final form of the ‘playful’ role that the image has between the symbol and the realism. Thus, image is a *something* that consists in

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<sup>2</sup> André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* vol. I, essays selected and translated by Hugh Gray, foreword by Jean Renoir (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) 110.

symbols and realistic elements. This does not stop Bazin's obsession to demonstrate the kind of physical object that the image is. If the image has symbolic tokens, than this means that the image must be an abstract form of the object-in-itself that is represented, whereas the image as a realistic element says nothing more that it can resemblance with what it represents. For instance, the digital images are thought to physical existence, their ontological ground comes closer to the one of the music. The connection between the image and a physical object is only contingent. However, the materiality of the image cannot be avoided since it presents a realistic support.

To reveal the ontic basis of the (motion) image Bazin starts a dualism. The photographic image comes in opposition with the pictorial image: if the photographic image is re-presenting reality, the painting image is interpreting the reality. In this sense, the pictorial image has a double role (aesthetic and psychological):

- a. the pictorial image is an expression of the spiritual reality: the symbol transcends its model;
- b. the pictorial image makes a duplication of the world.

In this way, the pictorial image leads to a conflict between style and likeness. If the pictorial image is a pure creation through the intuition of the artist, the photographic image is the objective element of the photography that offers the reality in its details. According to Bazin, the photographic image is defined by its fidelity to reality. But this implies a tension between the form in which an artist expresses the subject matter and the kind of thing an image is, in other words between style and ontology. Nevertheless, the photographic image is thought to hold the reality into which is *transferred* with the help of the mechanical reproduction, whereas the pictorial image is a duplication. On the basis of the ontology of the photographic image, the film can be realist since its reality is faithful to our perceptual experience of reality. Until now, there

is no identification between the object and the image, but just an exhibition of a support that receives information about an object, which is nothing more than a copy of the real object.

In order to solve the relation between (photographic) image and reality Bazin proposes the following:

- a. there is a determinative relation between the ontology of the photographic image and the realism of film;
- b. due to the mechanical reproduction, the ontology of the photographic image is a product faithful to the prior object.

If with the first statement we can be satisfied since the concept of realism is not well defined. The object from the photography is identical (apparently) with the real object. However, the difference between the two objects stands in their conditions of existence: the first object has artificial laws, whereas the second object is determined by natural laws. This means that the image has the power to re-present the reality itself, without having any kind of pretention of a possible identification between the objects. Therefore, the reality of the first object is the *locum tenens* of the reality of the second object and implies a significant difference between their real consistencies. The second statement implies a description of the reality in terms of semiotic terms that leads to misapprehend the ontological argument since the realism is a process and not a style.

Without doubt, the powerful point of Bazin's ontology of photographic image stands in his metaphor of the *mummy complex*. The photographic image is a resistance against temporality, thus it is transformed in a non-temporal art object: art is the form of the representation. Yet, this does not imply an identification of the image with the represented object, but a duplication of the prior object leading to a different type of object that is defined by non-spatiality and non-temporality. Continuously, the art has a mimetic *telos*: the photography is the technological development that stops the obsession of likeness. This means that the photography leads to a

*copy* and not to an ontological identification, with its *Leben* in the external reality. There is no reason to consider the object from the image as the real object, it is just a replacement, in this consist the power of the image, the power of replace the original object. This directs to a different type of reality that is defining for the image in general. Having this said, the semiotic interpretation of the image must be understood as a medium sign<sup>3</sup> that make possible the *transfer* of some qualities within the shape from the original object to the image's object.

The *transfer* must be understood as a direct relation between the sign and the object. The object of the image is described by the term *actual connection*: the equivalence of Pierce's term *real relation*. This relation comes in contrast with the icon that presents only a ground for denotation of its object, and is opposed to the symbol that denotes by the medium of habit or law. The risk of the indexical sign is that it can lose itself in an ideal presentation, whereas the index as *reagent*<sup>4</sup> can modify the object, any only this type of sign can explain the motion image since it reveals an actual fact about the real object: the relation between the photographic image and object is indexical.

In the case of the index argument<sup>5</sup> we have good reason to think the image as *locum tenens* of the reality. Firstly, due to the index sign the photography refers to a precursor reality, which underlines a distinction between the object and the image. Secondly, the object presented in the photography is in the past. There is no ontological ground to believe that the object of the image is the same with the real object. Finally, to be able to recognize the image's object we must be

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<sup>3</sup> Bazin leaves from Charles S. Pierce's semiotic theory. For Pierce there are three types of signs: symbolic, iconic, and indexical. Since for Bazin image function as a *footprint* for the real object, and the indexical sign implies a direct bound between sign and object, Bazin's ontological argument has to do with the properties of the image that are a function of its indexical status. See: C. S. Peirce and Victoria Welby-Gregory, *Semiotic and Signifies: The Correspondence between C.S. Peirce and Victoria Lady Welby*, edited by Charles S. Hardwick (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> "A weathervane obediently moves around to point (indicate, index) the direction of the wind due to the action of the wind on the object (smoke was for the Ranger and index of fire)". Floyd Merrell, "Charles Sanders Peirce's concept on sign," *The Routledge Companion to semiotics and Linguistics* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001) 31.

<sup>5</sup> The index theory used in film studies starting with Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972).

aware of the real object in order to see if it was or not produce thus, we must be aware of its status as an index sign. The identification of the photography and the object is impossible in epistemic terms even though they can be alike: there is no ontological identity between them. Hence, the object presented by the image is a *locum tenens* of the real object, a replacement that can deceive the eye. The identification between the image and the object stands only in the limits of thinking the visual image as a sign, but not as the object-in-itself. There is a *transfer* of the reality from the object to the photography within the mystery of the possibility of transferring reality. This is the reason why Bazin refuges in surrealism where “every object is to be seen as an object and every object as an image.”<sup>6</sup> For this reason we have all the reasons to believe that the relation between the object and photography can be seen in term of similarity.

When Bazin says that the ‘photographic image is the object itself’ he refers to the image that proceeds from the ontology of the model: the image is a model. In this case, the postulate of the index argument is that the image is formed by a causal process that depends on its effects on the process of generation. However, Bazin does not explain what means that an object in photography is identical with the real object. It seems that suffices to talk about the object from the present in its historicity. The object of the photography is non-temporal within the limits of the awareness that they appear from a past existence. The photography as the object-in-itself brings up Kant’s theory of perception. According to Kant, we can perceive only what we represent to our minds in space and time, these are a priori categories of the sensible intuition that we impose on every act of perception, not features of objects or the world as they exist outside us. Thus, a thing-in-itself can never be perceived. What we can know is only the external world insofar as it satisfies the general conditions of human knowledge. The image does not exist as noumenal but as phenomenon.

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<sup>6</sup> Bazin, *op. cit.* vol. I 15-16.

To be able to support the thesis of the image as the *locum tenens* of the real object we must reflect on the ontological possibilities of existing of such an image, an image that is “free from all contingencies of time and space”<sup>7</sup>. Appropriately, the film must be objectivity in time. With mechanical reproduction, time is rescued from its proper corruption. By this the film delivers baroque art from its *convulsive catalepsy*. In this view “the image of things is likewise the image of their duration”<sup>8</sup>. The aesthetic category that defines the *resemblance* of the photographic image is given by the power to represent the realities. More, “photography can even surpass art in creative power”<sup>9</sup> since the photography has the same being as the object: what matter is to offer the reality as it is. The purpose of the art is to illustrate a real image, i.e., the image is nothing more than transcendence towards what is real. In this way the photographic image is represented for the surrealist, because the boundaries between reality and imagination are eliminated: “every image is to be seen as an object and every object as an image.”<sup>10</sup> The surrealist creativity makes out from photography an image that is a reality to nature, thus is the most important event in art.

Although, the general condition to experience an object is given by the categories of time and space. Kant says that these sources of knowledge, time and space, as conditions of our sensibility are applied to object insofar as objects are viewed as appearances. “Time and space are accordingly two sources of cognition, from which different synthetic cognition can be drawn *a priori*, of which especially pure mathematics in regard to the conditions of space and its relation provides a splendid example. [...] But these *a priori* sources of cognition determine their own boundaries by the fact (that they are merely conditions of sensibility), namely that they apply to

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<sup>7</sup> Bazin, *op. cit.* vol. I 103.

<sup>8</sup> Bazin, *op. cit.* vol. I 15.

<sup>9</sup> Bazin, *op. cit.* vol. I. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Bazin, *op. cit.* vol. I 15-16.



objects only so [*sic*] far as they are considered, but not present things in themselves.”<sup>11</sup> From here we can deduce: first the photography does not change something about the space, yet the image is used as a metaphor [flashlight] by which its connection with an exterior world of its frame is lost. This means that the image can be experience as the reality of the photography or film, one that represent the original object. Second, the photographic image, by its ontological existence, gives us new possibilities of experience the object which are different from the experience with the real object: the natural rules are changed with surreal ones. Thus, the image as a *locum tenens* is a copy, a replacement, of the real object that becomes, by its non-temporality and non-spatiality, the reality of the photography and film.

### 3. Film and Reality: the Ontological Rollover.

The term *realism* is interpreted as revealing “a two-term relation of correspondence between film and reality.”<sup>12</sup> Bazin develops the relation between film and reality on the ontology of the photographic image. The relation is analyzed in terms of visual resemblance: the film must create an ideal world that ought to resemble with the real. This realism enters in conflict with the predisposition of the film as a fictional world. The reality of the film is affected by its metaphor. This is the reason why in the analysis on *Citizen Kane*.<sup>13</sup> Bazin avoid the model of direct realism in the favor for the perceptual realism. The film is a new way by which we experience the world whereas its reality differs from realism.

All the shooting techniques put in evidence the relation between the viewer and the film with the purpose to enjoy the reality of the film. In order to offer an experience of the world, the film must minimize the implication of the subject’s intention. In this sense Renoir is given as an

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<sup>11</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 183 [A39/B56].

<sup>12</sup> Noël Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classic Film Theory* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988) 142.

<sup>13</sup> In the scene when Susan Alexander commits suicide the unity of the space is respected being an effect of the internal montage.

example that expand the new-realism by using real location, natural light, and emphasizing ordinary events. The index argument is rejected since the perceptual realism aims a normal experience of the world. A film can depict its own world due to its autonomous temporally destiny. More, the films that Bazin give as examples of realistic films has little to do with resemblance predicated on the contingency and ambiguity of reality. For Bazin the absolute image is at the end of Robert Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest* called "the triumph of cinematographic realism."<sup>14</sup> However, the problem of the perceptual realism is bound to the correspondence between the film and realism, which is not the criterion of realism.

Lastly, Bazin develops its realism with the statement that exist several realisms. The realism of films must respect some principles that have to do with the shooting technique or with the montage, as the integrity of the dramatic space and the long takes (Renoir). Thus, the reality of the film is the doze of meaning that it can bear thus the moving image is an image of reality increased in meanings. On the other hand, the Italian new-realism does not exist since reality turns in facts. In this case a fact is "a fragment of concrete reality in itself multiple and full of ambiguity, whose meaning emerges only after the fact, thanks to other imposed facts between which the mind establishes certain relationships."<sup>15</sup> The fact is based on physical reality and they must respect the reality of the object from the image. The neo-realism comes in contrast with previous historical of film realism in leaving outside all expressionism and the process of the montage. It gives to cinema a sense of the ambiguity of reality. Rossellini is concerned with preserving the mystery of the reality; he continues the reality of the montage through the screen. The neo-realism can be observed in Luchino Visconti's *La terra Trema*, a film composed entirely

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<sup>14</sup> "The black cross on the white screen, as awkwardly drawn as on the average memorial card, the only trance left by the "assumption of the image is a witness to something the reality of which is itself but a sign". Bazin, *op. cit.* vol. I 141.

<sup>15</sup> André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* vol II, essays selected and translated by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) 38.

on one-shot sequences, “showing his concern to cover the entire action in interminable deep-focus panning shots.”<sup>16</sup>

The relation between the film and realism follows the ontology of the photographic image. The film abounds in styles (Bersson, Vasiliev) and they do not predicate with the relation to visual or even physical reality. However, not all the movies have realism, for example the German expressionism and Soviet cinema are not realistic. The realism of Bazin is a tension between reality and style and both, the style and reality are defining reciprocally. This is why Bazin realism is a way of interpreting reality and not reality itself. Thus, the motion image bears the sufficient qualities to develop the reality of the film, and by this becomes a *locum tenens* of reality for the film.

#### **4. *Locum tenens*: a Different Type of Reality**

The purpose of the film is to create an ideal reality whereas the experience of a film is the experience of the reality of the film. This is way Bazin says that cinema must be seen as an idealistic phenomenon.

To understand the reality of the motion image we should go back to the use of the words “realism” and “naturalism”. First of all, the realism and the naturalism come in opposition with the normative forms of realism. The French film from the beginning of 1900 offers a pictorial naturalism (the adaptation on Zola), or a critical realism (Renoir). Maybe the most important idea detached from this difference is Luckács’s theory on cinematic realism where he develops a relation between reality, alienation, and intensive totality. According to Luckács, Bazin developed an intuitionist realism, which reveals the possibility of a *total cinema* understood as an underlying connectedness between all acts and norms that the arts have or the institutions impose. Nevertheless, Bazin favors perception more strongly as a mode of access to the totality.

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<sup>16</sup> Bazin, *op. cit.* vol. I 38.

The spectator scrutinizes the indeterminacy and density of empirical signifiers that achieve totality with the coconsciousness: a spatial fragmentation within the unity of the shot unfolding in time, rather than a temporal fragmentation. With framing perception, the film as simulacrum reminds the spectator of the totality of reality. Conversely, “a total cinema is to provide that complete illusion of life which is still long way away.”<sup>17</sup> In this way, total cinema is nothing more than a recreation of the world in its own images.

When Bazin talks about the language of cinema he makes a clear distinction between the cinema of image (1920) and the cinema of reality (1940). By the first he means that the image-in-itself is the representation of reality with new extensions that are new realities. In other words, the motion image, though the montage, is an ordering of the images (of reality) in time. The moving image has an inner logic that function as a medium between the viewers and the director, its logic depends on the space and time of the action of the image. In this process of re-presenting, the editing, neutral by its non-appearance, cannot benefit totally of the *montage*. Bazin sees the montage as instrument of re-presenting reality by the superposition of actions by the means of alternative shots from each other. On the other part, the cinema of reality is a reinforcement of the meaning that one image bears by association with another image. The reality is exposed though the moving image, with the help of ellipsis comparison or metaphors. Thus, we can say that the reality of the film is a capture of the essence of reality that can open new dimension of the reality. But this does not imply, in any case, that the film’s reality is identical with the natural reality. However, the similarities between them can lead to identification, but one that is predisposed to error since the subject’s experience may differ from one reality to another. The film’s reality is a selected reality that has a time beginning and a time-ending, a space with different symbols and references. We can say now either that the film’s reality is a close up on an aspect of the natural-reality, or that the film’s reality is a different

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<sup>17</sup> Bazin, *op. cit.* vol. I 20.

reality that started to be built on the natural-reality. In both cases, the film's reality has its own characteristics which are different from the natural-reality: as a close up, the film's reality becomes an enclave of the natural-reality; is a micro-reality of the reality which is disconnected from the universal rules; whereas in the second case we just accept the difference due to film's reality consistence in different evident symbols, or added one, the static time and unchanged place.

The reality of the film is created within the montage which can be understood as a creation of a sense of meaning that images holds due to their juxtaposition. The montage can be used as an *aesthetic transformer*, which hides the meaning in the shadow of the image, which is revealed by the viewer. In other words, the movies of Eisenstein are not focusing on the events *per se*, but on the allusion of it: the montage is a creative instrument that can put in scenes the intention of the director. Thus, the moving image does not lack completely in intentionality of its creator despite the mechanical reproduction. Alongside with this, the sound has a subordinate and complementary role it supplies the image with a musical atmosphere in its way of revealing its reality.

For Bazin the image is interested in the reality of the dramatic space. According to him different directors, such as F. M. Murnau or Erich von Stroheim, see the image as non-expressional, whereas their films are art forms that consists in single shots, long-lasting, close-up. On the other hand, for T. G. Dreyer the montage and the image are the language of the cinema whereas the sound is left behind having no aesthetic implication in his films. Lately, the sound film was seen in the poetic realism of Jean Renoir. This means that the space of image belongs to the space of film and not to the space of reality: the image is adapting by offering new realities.

## 5. Conclusion

The relation between the motion image and the external reality must be seen in terms of visual resemblance. In this case, the film either is presenting a faithful reality or an ideal reality. In both cases the realism enters in conflict with the predisposition of the film as a possible fictional world, since the reality of the film is affected by its metaphor. Hence, the reality of the film must be a perceptual reality. Therefore, the motion image holds a perceptual reality and not an external reality: these two types of reality can resemble without identification.

We can see clearly now way Bazin was talking of more types of realism. The reality of the film has, as ontic conditions, some principles that have to do with the shooting technique or with the montage. The film technique produces a new reality: what are shown are some symbols of the external reality, which are making from the motion image a reality that is augmented in meaning. Hence, the motion image bears the sufficient qualities to develop the reality of the film, and by this becomes a *locum tenens* of reality for the film. But this reality cannot be independent of the external reality since the film itself is an object that is real, thus, the reality of the motion image lives in the external reality.

To conclude, the montage must be understood as an *aesthetic transformer*: the external reality is resumed to powerful symbols that the motion image holds. Only the viewer can reveal them, and with this he states the resemblances with the external reality. This idea is avowed, according to Bazin, by Eisenstein's technique through which he alludes to the external reality without rising pretention of presenting it. This is why the motion image is not completely non-intentional.

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## ACCESSING MODERN SELF THROUGH FILM

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This article aims to present an understanding of modern Self according to Josef Früchtel in his work *The Impertinent Self*, in which he uses film as a medium of reflection. If we agree that film compels us to rethink our understanding of the Self, the world, time, motion and reality, and that this has been the main emphasis in the ontological and epistemological approach to film philosophy, we could consider that this medium is able to engender understanding of the Self in the world in conceptual, historical and political terms. This seems to be the theoretical enterprise of Früchtel's regard of the topic of modern subjectivity. I aim to contrast his perspective with some of Walter Benjamin's observations on film.

### Introduction

I intend to discuss the understanding of modern self, according to Josef Früchtel in his work *The Impertinent Self. A heroic history of modernity*. The main ideas of Früchtel, for example the use of film as a medium of reflection and the understanding of the modern hero, will be contrasted with some of Walter Benjamin's remarks on the same subject. Both authors, at different moments, are somehow connected to the understanding that film compels us to rethink our understanding of the self. This seems to be the theoretical enterprise of Josef Früchtel's regard of the topic of modern subjectivity, whose speculative basis of justification refers to the Hegelian idea of an ambivalent subjectivity, an idea which Adorno renamed "declined self", which is marked by the paradoxical character of the impossibility of subjectivity to be reconstituted as a whole. In the use of film as an object of analysis and philosophical justification, Früchtel aims to point out, through his arguments, three layers of modernity, reaching a deeper one that indicates a different way of understanding the relation between modernity, heroism and film. As a former Habermas student, Josef Früchtel maintains the focus on the discussion on modernity. However, unlike Habermas, aesthetic experience plays an important role for Früchtel, in order to create a meaningful association between self, modernity and film.



In order to display the place of the heroic in modernity, Früchtel initially recalls a socio-philosophical thesis, which says that heroes cannot find any place in the social structure of the modern age. Before we begin to consider which theories are concerned, let us think of a strong critique against the existence of heroes in modernity.

### **I – Walter Benjamin’s opposition to heroic existence in modernity**

I would like to start by adding to this discussion what Walter Benjamin said about heroes in modern times. It could be true to say, at least partially, that Benjamin defends the thesis of a non-heroic-existence in modernity. Let us first consider Benjamin’s thesis on the impossibility of recomposing tragedy or tragic heroes in modernity, as it can be read in *The origin of German Truerspiel* (*Trauerspiel-Buch*), where he establishes a comparison between tragedy and German drama (*Trauerspiel*), going through theories of tragedy (wherein Nietzsche’s are strongly criticised). The result of his critical approach is that the aim to recompose the integrity of tragedy is very inappropriate for modern times. Since tragedy is traditionally the aesthetic places for heroes, we cannot think about heroes anymore.

Later, however, in his essay “The Narrator”, he agrees with some ideas of Lukács’s *Theory of the Novel* (*Theorie des Romans*) concerning a new conception of modern hero in the novel as the narrative genre in modernity. Even so, it is correct to say that there are no longer heroes, for they are transcendently homeless and nostalgic for what they have lost. The ambiguity of being, and not being anymore, is the expression of modern self and its heroic expression.

Thus far, the idea of modern self, found its expression in literature, through the novel, and it is not contradictory to what Früchtel says about modern heroes. The negative and contradictory aspect in both perspectives would be the task of recomposing an integral being, the self, as a whole, often idealized in its Ancient Greek performance. The perspective of modern hero is not collective, based on a strong relation to society, religion and culture, but it is the perspective of solitude (*Einsamkeit*) and loss.

As Benjamin considered the new form of perception in modernity, it is also important to point out that the way he sees film is peculiar, mainly attached to an aesthetic film reception through distraction, a term that he opposes to the traditional perception of art, namely, contemplation. He did not take the film itself as a means of reflection, but as a means of aesthetic reception, similar to Kantian or the pre-modern aesthetic tradition and its discussion on taste. The difference is that he inserts the unconscious and collective-mass in the experience of film reception, which could be understood as the opposite to the constitution of modern self-reflexive, because his ideas remind us of the collective experience, as an educational space to practice social and work conditions in modernity. It could be a kind of revenge against the oppression commanded by technical reality, considering a certain type of film able to destroy the “beautiful” appearance of society.

Regarding theories that arose concerning film at the beginning of the 20th Century, Benjamin was extremely critical of those who, with the intention of raising the film to the seventh art, compared certain films to epic narratives, that is, appealing to the classicist element in order to say what is, or is not, artistic. We cannot compare this to what Früchtl does, when he calls the first level of modernity “classical self”, for he is talking about the modern hero, and not transferring epic elements to qualify subjectivity.

## **II - Why is modernity heroic and where is it to find its reflection?**

A reader of Benjamin could react negatively to Josef Früchtl’s work. It seems, at the beginning, that he was following the same track as Benjamin, if we consider Benjamin’s theory of modern self in literature, especially where Baudelaire’s idea of hero is related, but also where aesthetic experience as perception is considered. However, unlike Benjamin, he sees or reads film itself in a more positive way, as a means of reflection, whereby it is possible to see in different genres of film, an oscillation of the constitution of modern self in a more complex way. For that, we have to presuppose that modernity is a non-homogeneous time era, but having layers, and

think that to each layer belongs a kind of being not represented in its integrity, but conflicting. It is in this sense that Früchtl composes the figure of modern hero marked by ambiguity and expressed in three concepts and associations. Firstly, what he calls the classical, a dimension of self in Hegel's philosophy related to the genre of the western movie, a dimension that makes up the idea that the self still longs for reconciliation with the world in the intertwining of subjective and objective, creating also a relationship of inter-subjectivity, in establishing laws, rules and standards. Secondly, the agonal self, a self-contradicted dimension related to German Romanticism and associated with gangster films. This agonistic principle of division of the self is mainly characterized by not reconciling elements of its internal division. This dimension can also be understood as a kind of recovery of the tragic in the context of modernity, although in association with the “cool” (or *blasé*) element of irony, which cools down the passion and suffering of tragedy. The third expression of the self is hybrid. Nietzsche and postmodern theories, related to the genre of science fiction film, displays the ambiguous character, conceived, this time, by two extremes: pride and disability.

1. In the first layer, the classical self, Hegel<sup>1</sup> is the starting point for considering one type of self, a hero who straddles the border between two different ontological realities, under the sentiment of loss. Lukács' *Theorie des Romans*, in this sense, echoes Hegelian ideas of the loss of *Heimat* (a transcendental home), and how nostalgic the hero is. Früchtl reminds the reader that Hegel is a great influence for Lukács in this early work – something Lukács himself acknowledged and regretted later. Nevertheless, he sees another important influence, which is the philosophy of existence by Kierkegaard, which gives a different tonality to Lukács' work, more negative than we could notice in Hegel's philosophy. The long history of the film genre of the western is an example of nostalgia

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<sup>1</sup> The reference Früchtl follows in Hegel's extensive consideration of hero can be found in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* and other works, such as *History of Philosophy*, and *Philosophy of Law*.

and solitude, especially the traditional westerns by John Ford. Früchtl is certainly not alone. His writing seems to be composed in a large dialogue with philosophical tradition, contemporary debate on modernity, and some theorists who, in general, realize the importance of westerns and the epic element in association with philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

Heroes, which are located within the art, are shaped by it. This means that we do not only think of heroes through art. Moreover, art and heroism are designed in unity with the notions of individuality and universality, in the sensorial field or in life. The permanence of the heroic figure in bourgeois society occupies a limited space because of its mechanisms of homogenization; there is no room for large demonstrations of selflessness and suffering on behalf of the collective. While the bourgeois, anti-heroic figure distributes the burden among his people, the hero then bears it, resigned and lonely. Hegel, according to Früchtl, was the first philosopher to verify the modern condition of social progress, through its bureaucratic devices, together with the form of government chosen, which defines the self as “one in the crowd”, instead of an individual being, who embodies the collective, something evident in the classical hero.

The interpretation through which Früchtl has led us until now has always been justified by the assumption that modernity and subjectivity are identified in a complex self that is represented in art as the emblematic hero of the tragedy. The classical self ambiguously recovered in the extension that lies between the advancement of civilization at the border of wild life, is made up of the unknown to be conquered. However, the starting point of this development is an empty home, an uneasy internal noise, which corresponds to the internal rupture of the subject. We are talking here of a certain type of western hero, who in comparison to the classical Greek hero, instead of facing the immensity of the ocean, confronts the wilderness of the land. John Ford's film *The Searchers* is the best representation of this type of modern hero. Früchtl's

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<sup>2</sup> See Josef Früchtl, *The impertinent Self. A heroic history of Modernity*, trans. Sarah L. Kirby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009) 17.

analysis of this film shows a method of reading a film that is not limited to a description of the story in order to relate it with philosophical concepts (Hegel, this time), and this is a point to highlight. The subject treated is the idea of an irreconcilable self in its original ambiguity; this idea is mimetically resized as a homeless existence in westerns, where the border between civilization and wilderness is the best concept and image.

In the part of the book, where the second layer or the agonal self is developed, Früchtel refers to Walter Benjamin, considering two main aspects: the definition of hero in modernity and the transformation of the hero as one acting himself. We have already understood that for Hegel art represents real heroes, who exist in the world. In this sense, it should be an artistic combination of man and representation, even if his existence has become weak and ambiguous, someone wandering in the vastness of his own life condition, waiting to be called to offer his help, but leaving after justice is restored.

When we move from the wilderness, and cross the line into civilization, we will find inserted in the bourgeois society, another type of hero, whose main characteristic is to play the role of himself. The hero as an actor goes on to provide not only a theatrical performance, but also a performance of himself. The actor mimics and displays his own heroism, as Früchtel says, because “not only does the actor play a hero, but vice versa the (portrayed) hero is also an actor, wishing to fit a role and an image of himself. Going quite against conventional and morally diffuse opinion, the definition of a hero thus includes the fact that he is an actor, parading his heroism.”<sup>3</sup>

The weakening of the hero, as well as his new condition in modernity demands a little investigation taking us back to Aristotle and his theory of tragedy. Früchtel refers to Lionel Trilling’s famous analysis by quoting;

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<sup>3</sup> Früchtel, *The impertinent Self* 155.

The Greeks were under no illusion about the actuality of a hero. Aristotle makes this plain in his comparison of tragedy and comedy: it's only in the genre of tragedy that the hero exists, for tragedy shows men as better than they really are, which is to say, nobler, more impressive, more dignified ... There can be no comic hero, for comedy shows men as worse than they really are, which is to say, more ignoble, less impressive, less dignified.<sup>4</sup>

In this sense, it seems impossible to talk about hero in real life. "In their perfect ambiguity", concludes Früchtel after Trilling, "heroes are artistic products: products of art and artificial. Only in the realm of art is the hero at home. Art - and this unites Aristotle and Hegel (and Danto) - is a *transfiguration of the commonplace*."<sup>5</sup>

2. In the exchange of one genre for another, we find similarities and differences. The transition is made between the inhospitable wildernesses of the Wild West, places traced by border constructions of small towns, changing into the big urban centre of a structured capitalist society. The gangster film, therefore, refers to the incorporation of the modern city, to the sedimentation of modern capitalism, acquiring an enterprising characteristic that reflects in the uneasiness and excessive ambition of the hero in this genre. The greatest similarity between the genres of Western and gangster film are the gunfighters. The biggest difference is how they use their guns. There is a real world in both heroes representation; Al Capone, for instance, is the historical example for creating characters such as Scarface. He is the egocentric figure, enterprising, go-ahead, rising in society through cruelty. There is enjoyment experienced through this. It is the best representation of the other side of the American dream, guided by the idea of material happiness and success. The tragic element is visible in this context of rapid and unscrupulous enrichment. The destiny of a gangster is known from its beginning: loneliness. It is, however, a different loneliness from that of the cowboy, who stoically accepts wandering in the vastness of

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<sup>4</sup> Früchtel, *The impertinent Self* 155.

<sup>5</sup> Früchtel, *The impertinent Self* 155.

the plains. The loneliness of the gangster, like that of a tyrant, is the announcement of death. The gangster is a creation of imagination in American film; in the real world of large urban centres, obviously he does not exist. There are criminals, instead. The glamour associated with uneasiness, a desire to wish without limitation, calculating, including the pleasure of cruelty; the fellowship with other men, who think themselves infinitely powerful, has always been accompanied by beautiful and unhappy women. Therefore, the death announced since the beginning of the realization of his ambitions, is an invention on a large scale in films, justified by an inspiration in real life, where criminals are kept under control.

3. In the third layer, the hybrid self, Früchtel establishes Nietzsche's thoughts in the context of German philosophical tradition, when he says that, “as for most of his contemporaries, the loss of faith and worship of heroes go hand in hand.”<sup>6</sup> Reading Nietzsche in a different way from Benjamin, Früchtel focuses in the *Übermensch* idea. In his interpretation, Nietzsche creates his idea of hero based also on ambivalent characteristics, which combines with the hero of the 19th century, bringing together, on the one hand, the nationalist representation of the warrior, and on the other hand, the romantic artist. Rather than repeat this composition, however, Nietzsche creates the idea that the hero must be transformed, transmuted into the *Übermensch* - the “overman” or “superman”, who renounces the will and displays himself as an aesthetic existence.

The interweaving of this “secular fiction” with the genre of science fiction - through experimentation of hybrid characters, in which there is something of the machine in the human being and something of the human being in the machine - will also be an interpretation of Früchtel on Nietzsche's *Übermensch*.

For Früchtel, besides the scenery, iconography of science fiction in film, with its spaceships, costumes, buildings, and other scenic elements, the most important thing is the artificial man.

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<sup>6</sup> Früchtel, *The impertinent Self* 189.

The hybrid self is what should be highlighted next to the understanding of what this genre recovers from the spirit of classical utopias, the spirit of discovering that Promised Land or the Lost Paradise. Therefore, the science fiction film pretends to search for a new world, but the better world they show is mainly an aestheticizing of a better society, in order to give us the illusion of reality in high definition.

The mixture of man and machine has several examples in different films. Früchtl analyses three of them: *Terminator 2*, *Blade Runner* and *The Matrix*. The most grotesque example of the three is the first film. *Blade Runner* is the most interesting of them, because it shows better the ambition of perfection in joining man and machine and, at the same time, its failure.

### III – Modernity and heroes

We should point out that Früchtl's theory, as considered in the beginning of this article, originates from a context, which is the German Philosophy of Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Lukács (in context), Benjamin, Adorno and Habermas, as well as Foucault, Deleuze, and Anglo-Saxon philosophers Charles Taylor and Richard Rorty. Benjamin is an able partner when considering film and its perception. The difference is that Benjamin did not see film as he saw literature.

Benjamin had his eyes focused on the 19th century, in which literature was the most important means of representation in society. Baudelaire's poetry in the second half of the century was a key to understanding modernity. Proust, at the beginning of the 20th century, was, according to Benjamin, an excellent interpreter of that same period, the 19th century. Both were important sources of reflection for Benjamin, who collected two important concepts from their work: "*correspondances*" and "*mémoire involutive*".

We can say that Früchtl considers film as the most important source of representation of the last century. Contrary to many interpreters, he reads films, not in the sense of imposing an



interpretation, but selecting what could be the support for his thesis: the impertinence of heroic subjectivity displayed in these three genres of film, compatible with the three layers of modernity.

At this point, we should remember that modernity is not a strip of time in a stretched line. The characteristics of modernity deals especially with the weakening of the self and the arousing of an organized society, based on industrialization, technique and a linear idea of progress, circulating in its own failure. New turns to old: to be renewed as the newest “new”. Films reveal, in a complex way, the use of technique as art representation, dealing with the past and the future, in different sorts of experiments. One of the transformations, under technique, is the role of the actor, and the possibility for everyone – without any study or practice – to become an actor.

In this sense, the proximity between Benjamin’s film theory and Früchtl’s is explicitness. It has to do with the rehearsal of an existence. The common assertion, thus, is that the existence of hero in modernity is ambiguous.

In approaching a conclusion, we could say that it is possible to interpret film philosophy in different perspectives. At the beginning of this article, we considered that film could engender understanding of the self in the world in conceptual, historical and political terms. This is something we have tried to discuss through Früchtl’s theory of modernity as being heroic at three different levels, taking as a reference Benjamin’s ideas on modernity and film, some of which were explicitly mentioned by Früchtl in his work *The Impertinent Self*. Through these two perspectives, we were able to follow the understanding of modernity as a concept: the “permanent new”. Thus the presentation is of a “constant new”, which is immediately replaced, clad in new clothes. It is, for example, what happens in the repetition of the narrative structure originated in western movies, which is repeated in the context and pace of the metropolis and its characters in gangster films. It reappears in the genre of science fiction, a hybrid of the other two genres, projecting space and time, retaining, however, traces of the past, seen and revised, revisited and renewed. Nothing is new and yet, despite constant renewal, others already supersede the

*nouveauté* in the speed of production of images and representations. In historical terms, beyond the cyclical and temporal characteristic of the same repeated modernity, it is possible to speak about temporal crystallizations through historical periods and constructions of characters in the scenic and cultural environment representations.

In historical and political terms, we can say that Benjamin faced an obvious conflict, balanced by extreme positions. His reflections on modernity and its ambiguously heroic types, however, are distinct from what he sees in the “nature” (or second nature) of the film: the amount of exposure that alters the dramatic role of “acting”. This value is not directly related to the political context that requires a “politicizing of art” against the “aestheticizing of politics”. The relationship between perception (*aisthesis*) and the “see themselves represented” on the big cinema screen (as a positive mimesis) are concepts mostly comprehensive in association with the development of the new technological media.

Finally, an - *unverschämcht*<sup>7</sup> - heroic modernity in filmic genres, still expresses the negativity of the old sense of heroism, against the absolute disappearance of it. The affirmation of heroic subjectivity in modernity, in Benjamin’s perspective existed in reality, and in the literary perspective, in order to reveal the decline of the self (according to a decline of collective social experience). The grotesque, the expression of ridicule is welcomed by him, because it contains a destructive and critical strength, able to reveal the aestheticizing attempt to distort the whole. In the Früchtlian perspective, the equally problematic representation of the hero finds in film, in the last century, a possible space of expression within the context of modern assumption of social equality. There is also a positive meaning of a real existence of the hero, if considered in the ambiguous and dialectical sense of what qualifies a modern hero. In both

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<sup>7</sup> Früchtli borrowed the word *unverschämcht* from the fragment 29 of Adorno’s *Minima Moralia*. A key word generates discomfort of translation into other languages, because it contains an ambiguity itself. On the one hand, it is related to the affirmation of the self in the form of negativity; on the other hand, the impertinence or shamelessness (both translations are possible for *unverschämcht*) shows that someone still dares, still comes out of the equal bourgeois society to affirm his individuality, for better or worse.

analyses, the permanence of the heroic figure in bourgeois society occupies a limited space because of its mechanisms of homogenization. For the matter of this presentation, both reflections have the merit of presenting the intertwining of philosophy, theory (of modernity), history and politics.

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## **“IMPOSSIBLE TO SEE AT HUMAN EYES”: FROM PHOTOGENY TO PYROTECHNICAL CINEMA**

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During the twenties, respectively in France and in Germany, Jean Epstein and Béla Balázs put at the centre of their reflections on cinema the same idea: that of primacy of visual thinking, able to show processes freed from the laws of rational logic. The concepts of *photogénie* (Epstein) and physiognomy (Balázs) represent a chance to show on the screen an “exceedance” in respect of the reality of ordinary life, dominated by verbal thought. From this statement, I intend to propose a kind of two “genealogical lines”: one connects Epstein to the *acinéma* of Jean-François Lyotard, the other leads from Balázs to the *sens obtus* of Roland Barthes. The two “theoretical couples” (Epstein-Lyotard and Balázs-Barthes) are close in providing evidence of an elusive dimension, which appears strongly in the cinema, that is a dimension indescribable to the usual logic. However, their theories are different in the ways of showing this dimension.

### **1. Photogeny and pyrotechnics**

In his writings of the twenties the filmmaker and theorist Jean Epstein reveals the philosophical stakes of the photogenic technique –a topic already tackled by others authors such as Louis Delluc and Germaine Dulac. In these writings photogeny is intertwined with the issues of movement and time, giving birth to a visual and original thought as opposed to the verbal one. Epstein depicts the camera as a thinking being able to show procedures different in kind from the ordinary ones; that is, free from the laws of rationality. In order for this potentiality to realize –a potentiality having to do with the truest nature of cinema– it is necessary to emancipate oneself from the tyranny of the story and the narrative, as well as of the melodrama and of the dictates of the industry, and simply convey that is “mention visually” the things of the world.<sup>1</sup> Epstein would develop this perspective in various writings, which are however far from being systematic. The theme of visual thought is predominant in Epstein’s first text entirely dedicated

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<sup>1</sup> On visual thought and narrative perspective in cinema, see Daniela Angelucci, *Filosofia del cinema* (Roma: Carocci, 2014) chapter 4.

to cinema – that is, *Bonjour cinéma* (1921) – as well as in his later text *Alcol et cinéma* –written in the late forties and published posthumous in 1975.

The departing point of *Bonjour cinéma* is the celebration of the novel character of cinema, whose appreciation requires for Epstein the necessary abandonment of the categories of the past and the effort to think with new words. The essence of cinema is neither the dramatic art, nor the story narrated, but rather the visual properties of the images, that is their “photogeny”: the quality of faces, places, and of the objects imperceptible to the human eye.

What makes the manifestation of pure photogeny possible –although intermittent, and never in its immobility but rather always through motion, face expressions, the fluctuation of heads, and the hesitations–is the close-up, defined by Epstein as the “soul of cinema” and its “cornerstone”. The close-up reinforces and intensifies the drama by creating an impression of proximity. The close-up, which is not restricted to faces, but rather involves also the intimacy with the details of objects and landscapes, catches the attention of the spectator “forcing” her to experience an excited vision. Invested by a discharge of nervous energy, the audience gets hypnotized by the screen and become insensible to the surroundings by means of a “optical emotive procedure” able to generate a peculiar, “one-way” state of consciousness: an addictive state, inducing a “hypnosis hunger” far more violent than that produced by reading or by theater.

The first pages of *Alcol et cinéma* reprise the topic of the power of the camera, which “mechanical predestination” is that of offering an alternative representation of the world by means of those cinematographic effects such as the *flou*, the time-lapse, and camera movements –once considered as flaws of the medium but now understood as its most proper expressive elements. This strong point of his theory, informing his writings since the twenties, is reprised and radicalized by Epstein in his later work: the camera has its own personality and is able to convey the photogeny in the world not through the mediation of the operator, but rather despite of it, deceiving its masters and smuggling under the yielding and compromises of the industry a

spiritual drug, the “de-rationalizing” poison of a new way of thinking naturally flowing from animate images. It is the camera itself that overcomes the rational prohibitions and, by transmitting images “similar in kind to those perceived by the sight, conserved by memory and composed by imagination”,<sup>2</sup> substitutes the principle of identity and causality with a cohesion between concepts governed by simple analogy. Cinema is thus “transcartesian” in its subtle eclipses of the principle of identity grounding classical rationalism, re-educating adults and stimulating youth to develop a visual thought which not falls into the stereotype as it often happens to verbal thought.

One can appreciate in this critique to Descartes the themes and atmosphere of Bergson’s philosophy: what cinema demonstrates with its existence alone is that common logic is surely useful but it is not the only possible one; what such logic is able to catch with the camera’s “mobile eye of snail”, “built on an extensible and retractile stem”, is ultimately and primarily the becoming. By looking at reality through a prism emancipated from any need, we are in fact able to perceive in the photogenic details the instability of the universe, the fluidity of reality to which society has preferred rigid figures, fixed rules, and immutable values.

Cinema’s insistence on the mobile aspect of the universe, in fact, has immediate consequences for its audience: “the audience deepened its way of hearing, imagining, and understanding without even realizing it; it tore apart its idea of reality from the petrified spells of a perfect order, from the dream of exact measurement, and from the illusion of total intelligibility”.<sup>3</sup> Ubiquity, simultaneity, fluid forms, and above all a new temporality no more subjected to constant duration, uniformity and succession, but rather liable to accelerations and slowdowns, ellipses, compressions and dilatations. If *The fall of the house of Usher* (France/1928),

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<sup>2</sup> Jean Epstein, *Alcol e cinema* (Lavis, Il principe costante Edizioni, 2002) 39.

<sup>3</sup> Epstein 58.

Epstein's masterpiece, experiments first of all slow-motion, a film like *The Glass Has Three Faces* (France/1927) gives a continuous sense of vertigo with accelerations and a frenzied editing.

The primate of vision and photogeny, which is in my opinion the extreme result of Epstein's theoretical trend, transforms cinema in a philosophical practice, or better in an *anti-philosophy* if with *philosophy* we mean traditional thinking. The sacrilegious comparison between cinema and alcohol with which Epstein closes his text is thus not surprising: cinema is in fact a liberating substance inducing us to endorse any affective flow and free ourselves from rationalizing schemes.

Several years later, in 1973, in an article titled *L'acinéma*, another French author, Jean-François Lyotard, stressed the necessity to empower the presence of non-identity, difference, and contradiction in philosophy as well as in the arts. Although these are reflections elaborated in rather different times and contexts, it seems possible to individuate a common thread informing these French theories, in particular for what regards their shared polemical target: namely, western culture as a whole, which, with its predilection for orderliness, ruled out what in his writings Lyotard called the *figurative* (that is, the indistinct in which representation is grounded) by privileging the *discursive* (that is, what gets manifested as organic and meaningful constitution).

By employing psychoanalysis, and in particular Jacques Lacan, Lyotard opposes the category of *acinéma* to a normalizing and unifying cinematographic staging. In the measure in which it consists in "the inscription of movement, writing of movement", cinema might also include what can't be represented, embracing the logic of "pyrotechnic", the lyrical exaltation and the excesses of immobility as well of "mobilitazion", abandoning any mimetic and functional intention in favor of the expenditure and intensity of enjoyment (*jouissance*).



## 2. Physiognomy and obtuse sense

Around the same time in which Epstein's writings got in print, another observer of the cinematographic phenomenon caught its revolutionary character, underlying the emergence of the primate of a new vision: the Hungarian critic Béla Balázs. Since his first text, published in 1924 with the telling title *The Visible Man*, it is clear how the author's primary intent was not that of endorsing the legitimization of cinema among the arts, but rather that of highlight the novelty of an artistic device capable of changing our very worldview.

According to Balázs, in its capacity to modify human culture cinema is an invention comparable to printed paper: as the latter transformed the "visible spirit" into "reading spirit", bringing the excessive dominion of the conceptual dimension and the consequent abandonment of the natural language of gestures and mimics, the former would radically invert the direction back in favor of the visual. By departing from an opposition between verbal and visual very close to the one offered by Epstein in his distinction between an abstract culture mediated by words and a culture of body expression, Balázs affirms that the influence of cinema would allow us to go back to an immediate visibility of the human being, regaining the centrality of that body which was on the verge of losing its expressive power, creating in this way a new visual culture (an expression currently at the center of the English-speaking debate).

The notion of *physiognomy* acquires in this sense crucial significance: rather than its immediate aspect governed by natural appearance, physiognomy indicates the expressive and mimic element of the human face which, by means of its bodily dimension, allows us to have a glimpse of the soul. As Epstein theorized as well, the very concept of physiognomy finds its cinematographic expression in the face's close-up, "the soul of cinema", but extends also to the entire body, to the masses, and to the landscape as the revelation of a "more" and creation of an

atmosphere (in German: *Stimmung*) according to the principles of expressionist aesthetics.<sup>4</sup> The most intimate and mysterious aspect of objects and gestures taken in their singularity, where the abstraction and imprecision of our words can't reach, is finally revealed by the "magnifying glass", that is the objective, the camera.

This is the theoretical background of the centrality that Balázs gives to the camera shot in this work and his other writings of the twenties, where the attention to editing (here still referred to as *Bilderführung*, that is literary "conduction of images") is functional to the continuity of the film. Such perspective shall provoke Eisenstein's polemical reaction, expressed in his 1926 essay with the explicit title "Béla Forgot the Scissors".

Although there is no confirmation of Balázs' acquaintance with Epstein's writings, the concept of physiognomy is very close to that of photogeny: as noticed, similar is in fact the extension of the idea of close-ups on objects, spaces, and masses; and identical is the dynamic idea of a device transforming what it reproduces by rendering visible what is otherwise impossible to glimpse. We can insist on the relationship between the internal and the external common to both concepts, according to which the soul –which is an internal and otherwise inaccessible element– is able to hit the surface. However, while in the case of photogeny such emersion, although granted by the camera, seems to take place directly, in his treatment of physiognomy Balázs insists on the procedures mediating the passage from the internal to the external. "The beauty of photogeny is a miracle, while that of physiognomy is a process".<sup>5</sup>

Leonardo Quaresima, the editor of the new Italian edition of *The Visible Man*, insists rightly on the closeness between the "more" in place in Balázs' physiognomy and the concept of

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<sup>4</sup> For the comparison between this idea of atmosphere in German films of twenties and the contemporary German philosophy that deals with the concept of atmosphere, see Antonio Somaini "Il mondo nel colorito di un temperamento. Cinema ed estetica delle atmosfere", *Fata Morgana*, 1 (2007): 43-70.

<sup>5</sup> Leonardo Quaresima, "Introduzione", in Béla Balázs, *L'uomo visibile* (Torino: Lindau, 2008) 55.

obtuse sense proposed by Roland Barthes in his 1970 “The Third Meaning. Research Notes on Some Eisenstein stills”. By analyzing a single frame of Eisenstein’s *Ivan the Terrible* in which two courtiers rain down gold over the head of the young czar’s head, Barthes individuates three levels of meaning: an informative level which gathers together information from the setting and the characters; a symbolic level, here represented by the downpour of gold; and finally a third “erratic and obstinate” sense featuring an inexpressible meaning and not coincident with the dramatic sense of the narrated episode. The author, borrowing a term used elsewhere by Julia Kristeva, labels this last dimension as *significance*, in opposition to the second level which is instead indicates a semiologically individualized meaning.

If the symbolic level is the one meant by the author and which one encounters when in possess of a clear evidence, and which in this sense could be called an *obvious sense*, the third stage is what exceeds the second, and can be said to be an *obtuse sense*, blunted and “rounded”, and as such able to open the field of sense as a “supplement that my intellection cannot succeed in absorbing, at once persistent and fleeting, smooth and elusive”.<sup>6</sup> Indifference to history and communication, discontinuous and extraneous to the temporality of the film (and this is exactly because Barthes offers his “theory of the frame”), the obtuse sense is itself an indescribable and fleeing excess escaping ordinary logic, a close relative of photogeny and physiognomy.

The idea of a dimension exceeding the representative level will be employed again by Barthes in his 1980 *Camera Lucida*. Here it is the *punctum* –the fatal detail, involuntary and inevitable, attracting our gaze, wound and bite it calling us in cause– that takes charge of everything exceeding the *studium*, that is the purely cultural and informative interest of photography.

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<sup>6</sup> Roland Barthes, “The third meaning”, *Image, Music, Text* (Glasgow: Fontana Press, 1970) 54.

### 3. Conclusion: an exceeding dimension

In his *Theory of Cinema 1945-1990* Francesco Casetti proposed a comparison between Lyotard and Barthes –the two philosophers who have been cited as the respective heirs of these two perspectives. What is noticed is a divergence between Lyotard and Barthes that is useful for me to mention: “Barthes found the unrepresentable within representation, in a series of details that could help redefine its overall design. Lyotard, instead, found it outside representation, in a series of measures that upset the laws that have apparently been defined”.<sup>7</sup> Such a statement is really congenial to the reconstruction here offered in its virtual pairing of Epstein -Lyotard on the one hand, and Balázs-Barthes on the other.

Following Casetti, we could say that in the first case, the couple Epstein-Lyotard, we have an immediate eruption of “pyrotechnic” and a radical upheaval of the laws of representation, while in the second one, Balázs-Barthes, the emergence of what is not reducible to the story is a process, and never totalizing. The two pairs constitute two different theoretical paradigms for what concerns the manner of representation, but they are close in their evidencing something that has to do with the truest nature of cinema: an exceeding dimension, particularly visible in cinema, something indistinguishable, that is impossible to see at human eyes.

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<sup>7</sup> Francesco Casetti, *Theories of Cinema. 1945-1990* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999) 212.

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# TUNING OUR TIMING: TIME DISTORTIONS IN CINEMA AND EMOTIONS<sup>1</sup>

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This paper is an analysis of the use of time distortions in cinema and emotion showing how our sense of timing can be tuned by the experience of cinema. The first part gives an overall description of how the concept of time matters for theories of emotions and, taking up some insights from psychology's establishment that emotions focus attention, perception and time awareness, how should we understand the way emotions changes and distorts our perception of time. This description will make visible that time is a crucial category for the definition of emotion and understanding the great ability of cinema for emotional impact and insight. Then, in the second part, I elaborate on the proposal that fiction functions as a laboratory space for emotional processes and further suggest that one of the ways this can be seen is by the way cinema mimics the way emotions change and distort our perception of time and how movies help us to refine our sense of timing. Exploring how cinema uses repetition and time contraction to increase our emotional experience, looking at specific examples of how *Back to the Future* (1985), *Groundhog Day* (1993), *The Ugly Duckling and me!* (2006), *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008) I illustrate the insights of cinema and point how films provide an increase insight into the experience of our emotional world. The exploration of the examples provides the ground to introduce the issue of timing as a specific characteristic of films. The last part of the paper verifies how the analysis undergone helps to clarify the way fiction plays a crucial role in the education of emotion by placing emotions within a modality which enables us to tune our experience of timing by giving time to emotions, showing how emotions distort time and letting us experience feeling about our own feelings.

Cinema offers time distortions and this paper argues that this emotional trait of cinema is partly due to its mimicking of the emotional impact on time perception and that, because of it, cinema tuned and refined our sense of timing. The paper begins by describing how time matters for emotions taking up some of the insights from how psychology has established that emotions focus attention, perception and time awareness. Then, elaborating on the proposal that fiction functions as a laboratory space for emotional processes,<sup>2</sup> I further suggest that one of the ways

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<sup>2</sup> Dina Mendonça, "Absolutely Positively Feeling that Way and More – Paradox of Fiction and Alexander's Stories," *Philosophy and Children's Literature*, ed. Peter Costello (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2012) 41-62. See D. Mendonça, "Existential Feelings – How Cinema Makes Us Feel Alive," *Cinema - Journal of Philosophy and the Moving Image* 3 (2013): 211-228.

this can be seen is by the way cinema mimics the way emotions change and distort our perception of time and how movies help us to refine our sense of timing.

Time is important and interesting for emotion theory and, consequently, crucial for how emotions are used, portrayed and explored in cinema. In an article entitled “Emotion” Peter Goldie provides a summary of all the aspects of emotions that a theory of emotion needs to accommodate in order to be acceptable. Among these we find the notion of diversity of duration and the way in which a theory of emotion must somehow make sense of the wide range of temporal diversity found in our emotional world. Goldie writes,

In this dimension, emotions range from short termed emotional reactions such as surprise at the sudden and unexpected noise behind you, to longer-term emotions such as enduring love of your children or parents. The former is best understood as an emotional episode or experience, and the later as an emotional disposition, but we typically use the term ‘emotion’ for both episode and disposition.<sup>3</sup>

Goldie rightly points out that theorists have already tried to make sense of this variety of duration by calling emotional processes with different duration different names, namely for example distinguishing episodic emotion from dispositions. However, the graded shades of in-between these two raise difficulties and whenever the emotional occurrences become a little bit more complex these clear-cut distinctions of episodic emotions and dispositions does no longer offer a decisive aid. For instance, is love and admiration for a person in a romantic relationship an emotional disposition or an emotional episode? And even if we establish that it is one or the other then further questions necessarily arise: does the duration of the romantic relationship interfere with the established classification? Does love and admiration change status if a parental love relationship is considered instead of a romantic connection? Does the classification

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Goldie, “Emotion,” *Philosophy Compass* 2 (2007): 928.

change depending on the age of the persons in the relationship? And the questions could multiply for our dismay.

In sum, the wide range of variety of temporal diversity of emotions raises many questions that are still to be fully answered even if we have at least managed to respond to some of the questions, issues and problems raised by the connection of emotions to time. In fact, the connection of time and emotion matters not just for a better understanding of how temporal dimensions are present in emotion and to present a complete theory of emotions but also for a deeper understanding of what emotion really is. It is the conception of time as a chronological entity that is at the root of our difficulty to encompass all of emotions diversity. The issue is more clearly explained by looking at the way behaviorist intellectual attitude still permeates a lot of our theoretical efforts to better understand emotions.

In an article about the connection between time and agency, Flaherty states that time was a central issue for the intellectual agenda of George Herbert Mead because he understood that the way time is conceived determines the way in which human reality is understood. Accordingly, Flaherty writes, Mead begins his influential course *Social Psychology* with a critique of John B Watson behaviorism, among other things, because the behavioristic temporality (that a stimulus (i.e. cause) precedes a response (i.e. effect)) meant that the past determined the future, and “Mead recognized that this temporal framework excludes what he viewed as essential facets of human nature: choice, novelty, emergence, and improvisation.”<sup>4</sup> That is, the way in which we conceive temporality and its connection to human action and human emotions also determines the way in which we conceive human nature. And although we have moved beyond the conceptual behavioristic framework we seemed to have kept its conception of temporality.

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Flaherty, “Time Work: Customizing Temporal Experience,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 66, (2003): 17-33. Sandrine Gil & Sylvie Droit-Volet, “How do emotional facial expressions influence our perception of time?,” *Attention, Representation, and Human Performance: Integration of Cognition, Emotion and Motivation*, eds. S. Masmoudi, D. YanDai & A. Naceur. (London: Psychology Press, Taylor & Francis, 2011) 17.



Therefore, it is not surprising to find out a similar complain in the literature on emotions. For example, Wierzbicka testifies this in her book *Emotions across Languages and Cultures* (1999) when she points out that the idea that feelings have a very brief duration is the reflection of a strong behavioristic bias in the semantics of the English word emotion.<sup>5</sup> The behavioristic bias runs across disciplines in various scientific areas from neuroscience to social sciences and humanities. Thus, accordingly, we find Ekman writing that he proposes that emotions are a matter of seconds which last a very short time span and that when people report that they have experienced an emotion for minutes they are interpreting several repetitions of the same emotion within the period of time they claim to have felt an emotion. Ekman says:

My proposal that emotions are typically a matter of seconds, not minutes or hours, is supported by some preliminary evidence. Examining spontaneous emotional events suggests a short time span. When subjects have reported experiencing an emotion for 15 or 20 minutes, and I have access to a videotaped record of their preceding behaviour, I found that they showed multiple expression of that emotion. My interpretation of such incidents is that people summate in their verbal report what was actually a series of repeated but discrete emotion episodes.<sup>6</sup>

According to the description of Ekman, even when people say that they have felt fear for minutes, theorists can be sure to interpret this as a misidentification of their own emotional experience thus making the behaviorist bias such a strong claim that not even reports of experience of an emotion can overcome, modify or demand theoretical reformulation. This is why in general what

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<sup>5</sup> A. Wierzbicka, *Emotions Across Languages and Cultures: diversity and universals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 20.

<sup>6</sup> P. Ekman, "An Argument for Basic Emotions," *Cognition and Emotion* (1992): 186.

will be found in the literature on emotion is that the term emotion will be reserved for emotional experiences that last a matter of a few minutes and a few hours.<sup>7</sup>

Given the underlying assumption of chronological duration of emotional processes the time spectrum of emotional experiences is summarized in an introductory book on emotion by Oatley and Jenkins in the following way: Expressions of emotions last seconds autonomic changes also last seconds and self-reported emotions can last minutes to hours while emotional processes that last days or weeks should be taken as moods if emotions last more than weeks then they should be taken as emotional disorders of some kind or personality traits, and personality traits last a life time in the figure of the spectrum of affective phenomena offered by Oatley and Jenkins. In addition they explain further that the spectrum of affective phenomena is such that the emotional conscious states “can be conveniently measured by asking people to keep structured diaries of these episodes.”<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, in the same introductory book, Oatley and Jenkins claim that there also seems present in the literature the idea that emotions do not happen as a whole all in the same chronological time. They write that, “[e]motions do not usually happen all at once. They are usually caused, then run through a process, then have consequences. A widely accepted proposal has been made by Frijda (1986) of an emotion as a set of stages.”<sup>9</sup> A suggestion that raises a series of thought provoking questions such as: How can emotions that last such a short period also hold stages? Are these stages measurable? How? Do these stages have similar durations for different emotional processes? Do emotional processes that last more time such as moods and emotional disorders also have stages like emotions? Oatley and Jenkins do not raise nor answer such questions at the introductory level for the sake of clarity of

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<sup>7</sup> Keith Oatley & Jennifer M. Jenkins, *Understanding Emotions* (Malden, MA, Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1996) 124-125.

<sup>8</sup> Keith Oatley & Jennifer M. Jenkins 125.

<sup>9</sup> Keith Oatley & Jennifer M. Jenkins 98.

introductory writing. Yet, raising them shows that the issue of time and emotions and their connections is more complex than simply ascribing them the duration of seconds or minutes.

When we track down the ways in which time interferes with the nature of emotion we find the duration of an emotion to be only a small part of this relationship. For how an emotion feels throughout its duration seems to matter for the duration of an emotion. For example, sadness feel a certain way when it first hits those who feel it but at it maintains its presence or makes its presence recurrent if feels differently. Also, it seems to be important when an emotion occurs within an emotional situation. For instance, a joke in a fearful situation will make its mark less durable than a joke in a situation of fun and amusement. It is also the case that the age of the person who feel the emotion has an impact at least in its phenomenology for joyfulness of a four years old is certainly different than joyfulness felt at 40 years old or at 80 years old. And to complicate matters even more it seems that different historical times impact the nature of emotion. Oatley, for instance, claims that, “one widely accepted idea is that in medieval times people were more expressive of emotions than now.”<sup>10</sup> And adds that the change of emotions over history is testified by how historians have shown that unpleasant emotions have been a concern of the nineteenth century in America. Also, philosophers have pointed out how the value of certain emotions has changed over time by the way the meaning of pride has shifted from that of an emotional expression to one a desirable emotion connected to affirmation of identity.<sup>11</sup>

In sum, it seems that the ways in which time is a relevant connection to understand the nature of emotion goes far deeper than emotions’ duration and that the remaining behavioristic attitude is perhaps more troublesome for it may be a sign that the issue is in fact so complex that emotion theorists have not yet been able to provide a more complete and less problematic picture

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<sup>10</sup> Keith Oatley, *Emotions: A Brief History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004) 16.

<sup>11</sup> Uma Narayan, “Working together across difference: Some considerations on emotions and political practice,” *Hypatia* 3.2 (1988): 31-47. E. Spelman, “The Virtue of Feeling and the Feeling of Virtue,” *Feminist Ethics*, ed. C. Card. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991) 213-232.

of the relation of time and emotions. It is part of the objectives of the present paper to show that the way in which emotions distort our feeling of time may be one way to begin to better understand their connection.

We are all familiar with the fact that when we have to wait for something time will feel like it goes by faster if we are entertained, while focusing on the outcome of the wait, and its anxiety, make time feel to go slower. Similarly a boring class may seem to take forever, while doing something else in that same classroom (reading a book, doodling, etc.) will make the same class last its due hour.

There is now ample evidence to indicate that when nontemporal and/or emotional events capture attention, the processing resources can be diverted away from the timer. This causes the subjective experience of time to be shorter than it really is.<sup>12</sup> In part this may be due to the fact that emotions require time. That is, emotions do not just last a certain period of time but seem also to demand a certain time and duration to be fully processed. Emotions demand time for different reasons: sometimes because to fully see the type of emotional process we are experiencing requires time as is needed to differentiate lust from love, or sadness from depression. Also, time may be needed for an emotion to reach its full realization, as it is the case with grief. In addition, some emotional processes demand time for its qualitative modification as is testified by the saying that revenge is best served cold. Finally, the occurrence of meta-emotional processes requires time as to enable emotion to settle in and color the first order emotional experience.<sup>13</sup> Just like all other types of fiction spaces and perhaps even all artistic expressions, the cinema works as a laboratory space for emotional processes<sup>14</sup>, and just like

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<sup>12</sup> Sylvie Droit-Volet & Warren H. Meck, "How emotions Colour our perception of time," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* (2007) 505.

<sup>13</sup> Dina Mendonça, "Emotions about Emotions," *Emotion Review* 5.4 (October 2013): 394.

<sup>14</sup> Mendonça, "Absolutely Positively Feeling that Way and More – Paradox of Fiction and Alexander's Stories".

experiments in scientific laboratory help to better understand and explore Physics and Chemistry, these emotional laboratories granted by fictional spaces are a crucial part of the way we learn, refine, and maintain our ability to be emotional.

The experience of cinema may enable to work out some of the needs of time of emotional processes in ways that may strengthen and mature emotional processes. Of course there are many ways in which emotion is worked out and explored in the movies for the construction and presentation of characters promotes emotions, and the music of a movie fosters emotional moods, as well as the colour and tone of a movie picture. And either providing information about the narrative or the characters as well as suppressing information may build emotional cues that emotional impact the viewer. Accordingly Smith in “Altered States: Character and Emotional Response in the Cinema” points out how Carol Clover has argued that in “the contemporary horror film we are both Red Riding Hood and the Wolf; the force of experience, in horror comes from ‘knowing’ both sides of the story.”<sup>15</sup> That is, providing more than one perspective of situations provides additional emotional depth because we not only see and feel fear with the threatened character but also recognize the true and adequate reasons for their fear and the coldness and distant motivation of the Wolf. In addition, the lack of need for action provides space to simply let the feeling run its course without jumping into action and thus opens the possibility for experience meta-emotional processes more consciously than in daily life.<sup>16</sup>

However, it is the time manipulation that may hold the secret to the intense emotional impact of cinema. As Di Franco testifies editing is a unique aspect of time manipulation and even the previous versions of such time manipulation in literature cannot offer the strength of cinema’s emotional impact with its “indefinable and elusive immediacy of film (which prevents

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<sup>15</sup> Murray Smith, “Altered States: Character and Emotional Response in the Cinema,” in *Cinema Journal* 33:4 (Summer 1994): 37.

<sup>16</sup> Mendonça, “Emotions about Emotions.”

all but the most disciplined viewers from leaving a bad movie) allows the film artist to go far beyond the boundaries of the written word.”<sup>17</sup> The emotional intensity felt in the cinema may be due not only because of the powerful force of editing and the fastness of the experience but also because cinema itself provides a time manipulation of its own. The point is more easily illustrated with what happens to the characters of the Narnia films. Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy go into Narnia world and live beautiful adventures and when they returned to England no time has passed by. Similarly when we go to watch a movie we go into a fictional world and experience various adventures, which may last years, centuries or just a day and then return to our daily life after an hour and a half and everything is still the same. And just like Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy we have lived adventures of the most varied types and we have learned something (about ourselves, about our emotions, about the world, about others). In this way, cinema can be seen such that the laboratory space for emotional processes is felt in a sharper and more immediate way in part because they provide a space that is in itself a time manipulation. Though a similar description happens to Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy when we read the novel we do not feel we have lived a similar experience unless we endure reading the book in one go and in a couple of hours which is perhaps faster than anyone can read. With its fast pace the cinema can provide a sense of similarity with the process lived by the characters and experiencing the same as what the characters experience makes us feel the laboratory space of fiction more poignantly and more intensely than with reading the book.

Movies provide emotional laboratory spaces in this a sharp, incisive and to the point way because emotions work in situated wholes<sup>18</sup> and cinema provides situated wholes almost at the same pace as life itself while it does not have to follow the pace and chronological time of real life events. In the movies the fastness of and the immediacy with which the images and subsequently

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<sup>17</sup> Philip Di Franco, “Past, Present, Future in cinema,” *Cinema Journal* 8 (Autumn 1968): 42.

<sup>18</sup> Mendonça, “Absolutely Positively Feeling that Way and More – Paradox of Fiction and Alexander’s Stories”.

the development of the stories affect its audience allied with the ability to provide time distortions both similar and different to the ones given by emotional processes may be greatly responsible for its the emotional intensity and the reason why reflecting on the way in the connection between cinema and emotion can be so important for Emotion Theory. When we experience a movie we feel but we also feel about our feelings within a certain situation marked by an emotional tone. By being capable of mimicking the way emotions make us feel and providing us with similar time distortions both by using emotions but also by presenting image as to both promoting certain emotional states and offering time modifications and distortions on top of time modifications given by emotions, the movies allow a deeper understanding of emotions connection to time.

Cinema is capable of using the way emotions provide time distortions because time distortions given by emotional processes can be felt in the way they shift attention and perception of situations. There is a growing body of evidence indicating that in threatening situations, for example when confronted with angry faces or electric footshock, there is an increase in arousal that leads to acceleration in clock speed and, in some cases, increased attention to the duration dimension of those stimuli associated with the fear-provoking event (i.e. more attention is directed toward timing the specific events associated with the fear eliciting stimulus, and less attention is directed toward the timing of other neutral or appetitive events occurring within the same context). ...The similar patterns of temporal bias obtained in different threatening contexts in both rats and humans at different ontogenetic stages suggest that these responses to fear-eliciting stimuli reflect an automatic, unconscious program of responses to danger, as described by evolutionary theories of anxiety and emotion.<sup>19</sup>

Movies can provide a similar sense of acceleration given by threatening context with the movement of camera without having told the spectator there is danger coming up, or with its cuts by providing rapid parallel time where two or more sequences are told, or by accelerating

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<sup>19</sup> Sylvie Droit-Volet & Warren H. Meck, "How emotions Colour our perception of time" 509.

time with quick change of shots that pushes the spectator ahead of time. That is, by mimicking the way attention and perception occurs in a threatening situation a shot can promote and suggest certain type of arousal and fear even before it tells its audience they are seeing a threatening situation.

It is important to recognize that although arousal is clearly a very important factor in the effects of emotion on time perception, it is not the only factor for the very perception of faces can provide a sense of threatening situation or a joyful one. Droit-Volet and colleagues found that angry faces produced the most temporal bias, and fearful faces were a close second, followed by happy and then sad faces. And since faces seem crucial, it is easily acknowledge that they can be used in movies for an overestimation of time has also been observed with the presentation of facial expressions of happiness and sadness,<sup>20</sup> regardless of the age of the subject, although overestimation appears to a greater extend for anger and fear than for happiness and sadness.<sup>21</sup>

However, for other facial expressions, such as disgust or shame, the temporal pattern was different. Gil and Droit-Volet observed no change in bisection functions for disgust, and a shift to the right for shame, which indicates a temporal underestimation.<sup>22</sup> We can explain the absence of this effect by the fact that the perception of disgust in others does not induce preparation for an immediate action enabling the organism to avoid an imminent danger. Consequently, even though disgust is considered to be a high-arousal emotion, in this case, the organism is not required to respond to an imminent threat. Thus, there would be no increase in the level of arousal accelerating the internal clock.<sup>23</sup> Given the importance of face recognition of emotional

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<sup>20</sup> S. Droit-Volet, S. Brunot & P. Niedenthal, "Perception of the duration of emotional events," *Cognition and Emotion* 18.6 (2004): 849-858. D. Effron, P.M. Niedenthal, S. Gil & S. Droit-Volet, "Embodied Temporal Perception of Emotion," *Emotion* (2006).

<sup>21</sup> S. Gil & S. Droit-Volet, "How do emotional facial expressions influence our perception of time?" 6.

<sup>22</sup> Sylvie Droit-Volet & Warren Meck 509.

<sup>23</sup> S. Gil & S. Droit-Volet 7.



expression testified by the literature on emotion and its importance for empathetic processes,<sup>24</sup> there is no doubt that movies promote change in time perception just by presenting faces expressing certain emotions.

Even though the urgency to act is subtracted from the experience in the cinema the difference in face of faces of disgust and shame shows that it is still important to feel the need for the urgency of action even in situations, like in watching a movie, where we are able to feel without the distraction of the need for action. This enables ability to pay attention to our feelings and also enables maneuvering the function of our attention (namely to details). It is as we were doing an experiment in feeling that both tells us In a frightening scene we are told what to watch for, as a type of emotional exercise that points out possibilities for action while at the same time enables us to see how we would feel about such possibilities and about our own feelings. That is, as if seeing a threatening situation in a movie would both show the viewer's ability to feel and at the same time indicate that whenever you are in a frightening situation you should pay attention to this detail in this manner, so as to guide the temporal distortion done by the emotion. This suggestion is highly hypothetical and would require experimental testing to verify its strength, but the way simulation practice functions seems to indicate the likelihood of the hypothetical suggestion.

However, its suggestion means that some of cinema's temporal distortions may be of great importance for understanding how emotion distort time and how emotions are timely connected beyond the way the chronological conception of time enables us to see. I want to point out two ways in which we can see these powerful lenses of cinema over the nature of emotion: first how some emotional processes hold cyclical temporal dimensions and second how emotions change their nature over the possibility of great periods of time.

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<sup>24</sup> Amy Coplan, "Empathetic Engagement with Narrative Fictions," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62:2 (Spring 2004).

It is not outstanding to suggest that some emotional processes get repeated over and over again. However when we see the temporal repetition in a movie some aspects of emotional repetition become interesting and salient and points out the importance and need for research and reflection on the nature of emotional habits. For instance, *Back to the Future* (1985), directed by Robert Zemeckis, shows that an interesting aspect of emotional habits is that they are inherited from parents and repeated from one generation to the next. Interestingly parents say things to their children to make them move out of the emotional habits they themselves pass onto their children and this paradox of education is humorously visible in the movie *Back to the Future*. The movie tells the story of a teenage boy, Marty McFly, who travels to the past to when his parents were teenagers by accidentally using a car-time machine build by his friend an adult scientist, Prof. Emmet Brown. By being transported into his parents' highschool time he interferes with his parents love story and risks compromising his own existence. Marty will spend the film trying that his parents follow the story well enough to return to his own time and succeeds him his challenge by giving himself a better present than the one he left behind. Throughout the film several of the characters say that Marty is just like his father though no obvious resemblance is apparent. At the beginning of the movie Marty tells his girlfriend that he does not want to send out a tape with his own music because "he simply is not prepared for that type of rejection." Later in the movie when Marty travels into the past he hears his own father say what he had told his girlfriend: "What if I am told I was no good. I'm not strong enough to be able to take that kind of rejection" making it clear that though the similarity between father and son is not visible at all the right type of perspective can give us the repetition of emotional habit from father to son. The visibility of transference of emotional habits is perhaps due to a position towards others and is not limited to same gender patterns as we also see Marty talk to his own mother (young mother as he has travelled to the past) and being told that he is beginning to sound just like his own grandmother and we can see in Marty's face that he himself thinks he is beginning to sound just like his own mother. At the goodbye moment of his trip to the past Marty

says to his mother “it’s been educational” (to meet you) as if to point out that this perspective where we see emotional habits being repeated provides an unique pedagogical stand.

Nevertheless we are not mere slaves of our emotional habits and though it may not be easy to jump out of these habitual emotional repetitions recognizing them and understanding them provides the possibility to move beyond them. In a way it is the repetition of our emotional reactions into these strange patterns of emotional habits that help us to become aware of them and work ways to get out of them. In face of our emotional patterns we feel powerless and it convinces us that we do not choose our emotional habits or our emotional patterns, nor do we choose the type of on going repetitions they seem to grant us. And even though we do not choose all situations we face in life when we realize and became aware of our own repetitions and of our own emotional habits we are in better shape to keep them or change them. Such is the suggestion of the unfolding blind repetition portrayed in the romantic comedy *The Groundhog Day* (1993), directed by Harold Ramis, which portrays an egocentric weatherman from a TV station in Pittsburgh, Phil Connors, who gets stuck into repeating the same day over and over again and is forced by the sheer repetition of reevaluate his life and actions. The repetition of the same day lived by the character Phil (weather man) taps onto the nature of emotional habits by mimicking the process of emotional repetitions and our reactions to them (we are surprised to see them happening, we struggle against them, we accept them, we get distracted with other things, etc.). The movie shows that there is a sense in which we choose our repetitions even though we may dislike them, just like Phil dislikes the Goundhog day event. In a way the repetition of the same day experience by the character Phil mimics what happens when we are not paying attention to our emotional habits: we seem to be conduced by life to repeated and relive the same situations and repeat our emotional schemes. And similarly to Phil we do not want to relive the same situations nor have the same things happen to us and yet no matter how much we force ourselves to act differently we seem to fall into the same emotional patterns. Yet, once we notice the repetitions we start asking questions similarly to the way Phil asks the various other characters

from the movie “what would you do if you were stuck in one day?” By having a movie mimicking this repetition process of emotional habits it provides an insight into emotional habits because it puts us more alert to repetitions and may, hopefully, accelerate the process of overcoming them by having us forced into emotional repetition within the fictional laboratory space of the movie. Perhaps because when we are surprised to see the repetition of the emotional patterns just like it eventually happens to Phil after the first repetition of panicky trying to overcome the repetition, we are more capable of looking at our emotional habits and accept their existence and their mode of operation. Likewise, one can be daily angry at other careless drivers on the way back from work but once the driver looks at this as a repetition it is then possible to start asking questions to oneself. Similarly to the way Phil starts to ask questions to the other characters from the movie. The questions reveal little by little the format and details of the emotional habits and emotional patterns. Perhaps one is only angry with other careless drivers when environment at work is tense or when tasks are overdue. What the process of repetition with the awareness of its occurrences and the raising of questions about it may slowly promote variation in the repetition such that one day one wakes up differently just like Phil wakes up one day in the following day when he had lost almost all hope that it would finally move on in time.

It is important to note that emotional habits are not limited to the way we emotionally react with situations, for example how we react to a dangerous situations, emotional habits refer also to the emotional reactions we have face our emotional experiences themselves. For example, laughter can become a habit in first dealing with a sense of fear, as it may be an emotional habit that facilitates and increases attention and distance from the dangerous situation, and the added sense of shame from laughing at fear may also be a way to keep focus in the dangerous situation we face. It may be that given the fact that emotions are layered in addition to being simply sequential, emotional habits arise in such a way as to provide repetitions precisely to find ways to try to overcome impasses in life. That is, the meta-emotional processes that exist and also

become emotional habits are determinant in the overall experience of emotion.<sup>25</sup> Thus the ability of the movies to grant us an intense perspective upon our own meta-emotional processes may be connected to the way visual cues and perspective get identified in the movies with connections between emotions and meta-emotions since, as Feagin accurately describes, the names we have to describe emotions and meta-emotional states are the same. In an essay called “The Pleasures of Tragedy,” Susan Feagin writes,

It should be noted that in ordinary as well as aesthetic contexts the two kinds of responses cannot be distinguished merely by what words are used to describe them. “Pleasure,” shock,” melancholy, and “delight” may all describe direct or meta-responses, and the two are not always clearly distinguishable from each other. A blush of embarrassment may be intensified by embarrassment over the blush. That two things being distinguished cannot be infallibly distinguished, and that there are unclear cases of how and even whether the two are? distinguishable, does not necessarily undermine the utility of the distinction.<sup>26</sup>

One of the reasons why meta-emotional processes are so important is that they colour the impact of the first order emotion.<sup>27</sup> For example, fear becomes a different felt emotion when one is embarrassed for feeling it of when one is scared of feeling it.

One of the ways in which we can best see how cinema provides a special and insightful look into meta-emotions is the way time can get compressed within a film. A film that lasts an hour and thirty to fifty minutes may compress centuries such as *Orlando* (1992) by Sally Potter or the duration of a whole life such as *Citizen Kane* (1941) by Orson Welles. The compression of

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<sup>25</sup> Mendonça, “Emotions about Emotions” 394.

<sup>26</sup> Susan L. Feagin, “The Pleasures of Tragedy,” *Arguing about Art*, ed. Alex Neill & Aaron Ridley. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc. 1995) 208.

<sup>27</sup> Mendonça, “Emotions about Emotions” 394.

time in movies enables the vision of the strength and regulation of emotions by meta-emotions more clearly when we see the change value of first order emotions by the sequence of the narrative because of the transformation of a painful hard situation into a step of a growth situation such as is portrayed in the animated film adapted from the Andersen's story *The Ugly Duckling and Me!* (2006), directed by Michael Hegner and Karsten Kiilerich. Of course, the Andersen's story *The Ugly Duckling* is perfect for this because we clearly see someone who is small and feels ugly and horrible who then grows up to be a beautiful Swan but the insight is to feel secure of better outcomes when one feels negative emotions about oneself as to endure life to wait for its rich outcomes. Thus pain no longer feels simply like pain but as a temporary hard moment that needs to be endured and by feeling pride in one's pain one may be more capable of managing the hard moment of the present. The contemporary animated version reinforces the impact on the self of the audience by introducing the narrator as a 'me' who is the rat named Ratso who guides and tells the story of the Ugly Duckling thus personifying the way the story should be emotionally incorporated in the audience as providing meta-emotional processes that help to endure hard and painful first order emotional processes.

The cinema provides a special experimental space because it integrates each personal and the singularities of each one of us. That is, the movie does not offer just a format of an emotional habit, nor one format of an emotion and a correlated meta-emotion but provides a way for feeling these complexities with the details and differences of each individual story of each individual spectator of the audience. That is, though we may be able to provide general framework for the experience of sadness or fear and hit the majority of the world population with a movie it is still the case that if we take each spectator in its individuality we will see that those general formats need to accommodate and be adapted to the individual story of each spectator. The reverse compression of a life offered by the film *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008) shows how this is done in every film. The movie is about the story of Benjamin who is born in 1918 and abandoned as a baby for looking deformed. Benjamin is raised in an old person's home and meets

the love of his life, the granddaughter of a habitant of the home. While people around him get older Benjamin gets younger as time goes by. While watching the story of Benjamin in the reverse direction of his own the spectator feels it portrays the growth pattern of all human beings and the spectator feel as an accurate description of everyone who grows up when he hears Benjamin narrate that the oddest thing about growing is realizing that what has changed is nothing else but our person and when the spectator hears Daisy ask him “How does it feel to grow younger?” and Benjamin replies that he does not know because he is always seeing things from his own eyes the spectator cannot but feel identified by the paradox of individuality. The identification of that moment in the film fulfills two roles: first the spectator feels the singularity of his and her own story and, simultaneously, feels that it is very hard to observe our own singularity because we are always looking from within.

Thus, by compressing and inverting the direction of a life within a film as done in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008) directed by David Fincher provides a way to look for common traits of meta-emotional experience within different individualities even when emotional experiences are as different and varied as growing in reverse.

The essay so far as argued for the extension of emotional experience by means of fiction and argued that cinema provides the laboratory space of emotions even more intensely because it mimics time distortions similarly to the way emotions make time distortions. The offer of this laboratory space of emotional experience is not merely a matter of increasing the quantity of emotional life but that of providing a refinement of emotional experience. One way to point out the advantage of emotional insights provided by cinema is to show how these examples of emotional experience and emotional expansion provided by movies helps us to acquire a sense of timing.

Timing can make all the difference in the world: a football match may be decided by a superb timing of a kick, and a music composition can be changed by the timing of a note. One

may, for example, have all the necessary qualifications for a job and even have all documentation prepared for application but if the timing is wrong a job opportunity can turn into a dilemma. One of the ways to master timing and its effect is feeling the emotional world in all its dimensions and complexities. Thus, and given the suggested hypothesis of the laboratory emotional space offered by the cinema it is not surprising that timing is fundamental for the emotional impact of a movie. Timing determines the affective tone of an event because, as Feagin writes, “[a]nticipation, tension, suspense, boredom, strangeness, and many other answers to films depend to a certain extent to timing.”<sup>28</sup>

Timing is the moment where something happens or when someone chooses to say, do, see, or hear something and the emotional impact of a movie is intimately connected with its timing. In “Time and Timing,” Feagin defines timing has a characteristic of the film in itself because it cannot be obtained by the way the images promote or offer certain reactions nor simply by the analysis of the psychology of the spectator<sup>29</sup> and consequently timing can only understood as a property of the movie in itself and is connected with the duration of the scenes or the temporal connection between scenes and timing, adds Feagin, must be distinguished from the temporal line that is presented within the movie and the narrative of the movie which is mostly defined by the sense of temporal sequence of events.

According to Feagin the notion of timing is grasped not by pointing out elements of the movie nor elements of the psychological make up of the spectator but only by what happens to the spectator watching the movie in face of the duration of a scene or the comparative duration of two scenes. As an example Feagin describes the duration of the scene of the enemy of Indiana Jones in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) which shows a master of swordsmanship and then changes into a cut of Indiana Jones’ face who then pulls up his gun and shoots the enemy, pointing out

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<sup>28</sup> Feagin 168.

<sup>29</sup> Feagin 171-172.



that the lengthy scene of the sword mastery of the sward in contrast with the quick and easy shooting of Indiana is the timing that confers humour to the moment.<sup>30</sup> Feagin further describes that timing can affect responses indirectly “when it is responsible for generating cognitive states or activities that in turn figure in the production and perhaps maintenance of emotions or affective states”<sup>31</sup> and it can also influence affective responses directly when timing is “linked to production of feelings and moods such as melancholy, tension and relaxation, joyfulness or well-being, anxiety or boredom.”<sup>32</sup>

However, Feagin describes that it is difficult to isolate the effective role of timing and though we recognize it and its importance “[t]he effective potential of timing may always be at least partly a function of the content that is timed the way it is.”<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, we can say that the experimental space offered by movies can help us to tune our sense of timing because cinema provides time distortions that enlighten how emotions themselves distort time, that provide time to emotional processes in such a way that we can become more aware of our meta-emotional processes and experience how we feel about our feelings.

It remains to be further investigated what good timing is and consequently how tuning out timing can be improved. An example may better grasp the future direction of reflection. If we follow Feagin’s insight about the comparison of duration of two pertinently connected scenes as to provide feelings and emotions that are the outcome of timing we can look into the way in *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) directed by Guy Ritchie the time and the way the fast images go by when Sherlock Holmes is thinking compared to the time when events do follow in line with the thinking process of Sherlock Holmes. The fast pace of Sherlock’s thinking versus the regular pace of the

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<sup>30</sup> Feagin 169.

<sup>31</sup> Feagin 174.

<sup>32</sup> Feagin 177.

<sup>33</sup> Feagin 172.

events (which are still fast but slower compared to his thinking) provide the spectator with a deep sense of the intelligence and sharpness of the thinking process of the character of Sherlock. In addition, these also provide an interesting experience in the movie of the difference and connection of thinking about a sequence of events and the actual happening of the thought sequenced events. The difference of pace from one to the other is a good way to tune our sense of timing and use it in the experience of the difference of pace from thought to action and, we could even go as far as to say that being acquainted with this difference of duration from thought to action is a way to acquire a better sense of timing and of what consists good timing. Yet to better understand the way in which timing may be sharpen, improved and refined with the laboratory space of emotions more needs to be investigated as to better understand the identity of rhythm that movies offer about timing and how it affects emotional responses and how it provides films with certain moods, emotions and feelings about feelings.

Recognizing the crucial importance of timing and the way in which cinema provides further insights into the relationship between emotions and time opens more possibilities for making cinema an ally of reflection and ensure that education is a path for freedom and away from domestication. Of course, the fast pace of cinema's fictional space also decreases the experience that demands slowness and may possibly steal moments of depth that the fictional space may also promote and this is why, perhaps, the refinement of the art of cinema demands the move to deepness of content and images to be and that when film makers reach this level the movie's impact is great.

Nevertheless, in what concerns our emotional world, as long as there are movies that expose the movements of emotions while simultaneously making it possible to further investigate, we will, hopefully, not be trapped by the simplicity of emotions-words and, consequently, join De Sousa when he writes that "if we cease to think of our emotions as

inevitable in just that way, we are also more likely to view them as open to modification, and to enlist them as instruments of freedom rather than tools of self-oppression.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> R. De Sousa, “Emotions, Education and Time,” *Metaphilosophy* 21 (1990): 443.

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## TOWARDS AN OPTICAL TECHNOLOGY OF SELF: CONSCIOUSNESS, EMBODIMENT AND ECOLOGICAL MOVIEGOING

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Giving up the unity and the wholeness of self refers to a whole philosophical phylum which relates to continental and analytical thinking, and has been addressed by cinema and media studies. Such philosophical movement claims the lack of a central core of consciousness, conceiving the self as a distributed by-product of brain, body and environment coupling. In the contemporary debate, much attention is given to optical technical media as a model or metaphor for understanding human mind, as well as an epistemic tool for thinking. By combining strands from continental phenomenology, radical thought, embodied cognitive science and media theory my article will address topics of mind, awareness and subjectivity in regard of audiovisual experience. Starting from Michel Foucault's notion of technology of self, my claim is that cinema and optical apparatuses represent a paradigmatic "dispositifs" for scaffolding and attuning conscious experiences. In this perspective, the daily *use* of moving-images is an epistemic tool for mind extension and the distribution of human cognition. As this continuous shifting of awareness and presence among environments attunes our very sense of what-is-likeness, an alternative archaeology of mind through media is thus proposed.

In the study of being, many efforts have been carried out in order to understanding what is like to be conscious and whereby is possible to get experience and being aware of it. In some extent, these inquiries have been enhanced through allegories based on imaginary technical and optical apparatuses of vision. In this sense, the epistemological oculo-centric concept of "representation" has largely hegemonized the genealogy of such a Western philosophical framework. Since Aristotle's mention of the basic principle of *camera obscura* and his further emphasis on the artwork as an imitation of nature, in Western tradition the problem of perceiving phenomenon has been ostensibly identified with pictorial perception.<sup>1</sup> Hence, it is generally understood that ontological, metaphysical and phenomenological Western tradition has

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<sup>1</sup> For a theoretical and historical overview of this topic see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990); Paul Gilbert, and Kathleen Lennon, *The World, the Flesh and the Subject: Continental Themes in Philosophy of Mind and Body* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005); Terence Wright, *Visual Impact: Culture and the Meaning of Images* (Oxford: Berg, 2008).



theorized human consciousness through a linear-perspective based paradigms. As Descartes identified the “pineal gland” as a physical locus of soul (i.e. consciousness), theories of perspective representation have interlocked with the domain of mind, considering retinal images as something *projected* into and viewed by an imaginary mind’s eye. Furthermore, with the introduction of the mechanical technology of light storage and reproduction (photography and cinema, in particular) the history of media and the philosophy of consciousness have been intertwined towards a representationalist and moving-pictures-inspired concepts of human experience.<sup>2</sup>

However, different strands of theoretical disciplines have undermined such formulation giving up the transcendental unity of consciousness and buttressing an iconoclastic understanding of what is like to be an agent-within-an-environment. Starting from the phenomenological movement, this theoretical network intertwines strands from radical thought, cybernetics, cognitive science and, as I argue, from cinema and media theory. In each of those disciplines, theories about the lack of a central core of consciousness endeavors an environmentally distributed concept of self, suggesting more than one affinities with each other that, I contend, are rarely taken into account collectively. Phenomenology and continental radical philosophy are discarded by analytical and cognitivist approach as un-empirical and ideologically corrupted, whereas, from the other barricade, Anglo-American empiricist tradition is underestimated for its supposed lack of historical inquiry and its universalist claims. Film and media studies are a privileged district where either theoretical warlords do clash. Where am I when I watch a movie? Does my Self, coalesces with that of the fictional character on the screen, or am I still aware of an extra-filmic framework of existence? If yes, what kind of “awareness” has I when I interact with an optical technological medium? Psychoanalytic, semiotic and Marxist-oriented theories of the “dispositif” (Metz, Baudry, Oudart), which have hegemonized

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<sup>2</sup> See Erkki Huhtamo, “Mind, Memory and Consciousness,” *Illusions in Motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

film studies of the 70s, have been undermined by cognitive and psychological studies on narrative understanding, emotional engagement and ecological perception. The realm of unconscious has been expropriated by that of cognition.<sup>3</sup> Far from joining this battle which has been still going on since the 80s, I would watering the best branches of either contenders, and digging out an alternative trans-disciplinary theoretical root that may lead to new pathways, and hopefully, end up with such an old-fashioned “depart-mental” Mexican standoff. In doing so, I will try to intertwine two theoretical networks: the “Soft” one, which relates to thinkers of the subjective, phenomenological and “ineffable” aspect of being conscious, and the “Hard” net, which rather focuses on the sub-personal, non-conscious and extended processes of “being-in-the-world” within our biotechnological environment. Soft and Hard networks just refers to object of studies, but would also share epistemologies, discourses and authors, and in doing so, generating an in-between theoretical matrix which is at the core of our inquiry. As I propose, both networks would share relevant commonalities if we are able to shift from traditional Western epistemological attitude towards consciousness, mind and self. In doing so, I will confront those philosophical paradigm with theoretical studies on optical technological media. In general, those authors and those theories we will relate with, do sustain (i) an ecologically approach to mind and self, conceiving the experience of self as a distributed by-product of brain, body and environment coupling. Therefore they emphasize that (ii) technological media provides models and metaphors for mind’s interpretations and actively concur in the *supervenience* of our phenomenological experience. Finally they share the idea that (iii) mind and self are themselves “technologies” which are historically, culturally and biologically situated and that human consciousness has arisen as a result of such technological innovation.

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<sup>3</sup> For a general overview on the cognitive theories of spectatorship in regard of analytical philosophy, ecological perception and emotions see respectively David Bordwell and Carroll Noël, *Post-theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996); Joseph Anderson and Barbara Fisher Anderson, *Moving Image Theory: Ecological Considerations* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007); Carl R. Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator’s Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

In a previous study inspired by Daniel Dennett's models of consciousness I tried to outline the effect of the transmedia artwork of Carmelo Bene on spectatorial "positionality". With such a term, I would intertwine the analytic-style definition of active spectatorship (one which actively "cognize" in order to gain sense and understanding of the cinematic experience) with the Foucauldian notion of "subjective positionality" (a void position, shaped by the psycho-discursive logic of cinematic apparatus). My article will take into account both the instances, trying to enucleate a philosophical reasoning about the concept of mind, consciousness and self through the fundamental role of cinema as a "mind-modulator" device.

Starting with the Soft-network, now I would make a comparison between the notion of "consciousness" and that of "awareness". Consciousness can be described as a diffuse state of mind wherein we experience our sense of agency and control. Awareness is a conscious state directed towards an object which, in phenomenological lingo, is often referred as "intentionality". According to Dennett, being aware of content or a mental state, and being aware of an intention which directs our behavior, are concepts often confused. Instead of being aware "of", Dennett focuses on two kinds of awareness "that". Either are oriented towards a mental or material object, but we are aware1 (a1) when is possible to get a report of our conscious states, and aware2 (a2) when such intentional mental activity goes unnoticed, as in the case of unconditional reflex or in the "automatic" series of high level actions we execute by driving a car or by performing a sport.<sup>4</sup> For Dennett, phenomenology get access to a1 states, whereas a2 occurs unconsciously and involves a "pandemonium-style contention" among brain's subsystems whom we can't get access through direct introspection.<sup>5</sup> In analyzing the cinematic or audiovisual experience, we encounter essentially the same issue: we are a1 of the diegetic events and a2 of a multitude of events that

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel C. Dennett, "Awareness and Consciousness," in *Content and Consciousness* (London: Rutledge & K. Paul, 1969) 114-146.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991). For a "revision and renewal" of Dennett's theory of consciousness see Daniel C. Dennett, *Sweet Dreams: Philosophical Obstacles to a Science of Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

occur during a screening: changing in the surrounding environment (inside and outside the screen); subsequent sensorimotor loops and galvanic skin reactions; a whole series of “cinematic affordances” (film narrative and characters, editing style, angles, intertextual cues, etc.) which provide a cognitive “scaffolding” to make sense, reasoning on and ultimately enjoy of film experience. Nonetheless, for Christian Metz, a similar distinction of awareness is what permits to the spectator a primary identification with the sight of the camera and later, a secondary identification with the fictional character. Instead of a rigid (and transcendental) subjective positionality, which will be heralded by Althusserian inspired theories of apparatus, for Metz the spectator is continuously dislocated in and out the screening. Arguably such “fluctuating presence” of the spectator regards multiple state of awareness inasmuch, Metz notes, we often are not aware of the conventional shots but in front of an “uncommon angles” we suddenly become aware of the “*emplacement*” of our own presence-absence.<sup>6</sup> This focus on the presence-absence of the conscious self within an imaginative environment, lead me back to Jean-Paul Sartre’s notion of “conscience imageante” (imagining consciousness). By overtaking the transcendental bottleneck of Husserlian intentionality, Sartre had indeed reassessed the being-in-the-world of consciousness, electing the study of the imagination as a privileged way to grasp such intuition. Although, for Sartre the imaginative experience, as well for Metz the cinematic experience, risks to fall into an “illusion of immanence”. By this term Sartre defines the folk-fallacy that is generally believed that an imaginary distal object (*analogon*) possesses the same sensible qualities of a perceptual object. In the words of the French philosopher, the *analogon* affords only a “quasi-observation”: the mental image cannot teach anything, why the subjective impression that I have is the result of an approximate, degraded and self-referential knowledge.<sup>7</sup> Such a fallacy is devoted of the pictorial-representationalist tradition towards phenomenal event but, as

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<sup>6</sup> Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) 55.

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre and Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2004) 10.

I will show, of a bodily-based projection of sensorimotor schema onto the mental world. Sartre's "illusion of immanence" has a strong affinity with Dennett's notion of "Cartesian Theatre", the theoretical fallacy which presupposes a special place in the brain where conscious representations are displayed to the self. Arguably Dennett's model of "narrative self" which tries to explain the human existence as an illusion generated by the neural spinning of micro-narratives, buttresses the phenomenological concept of consciousness as an existential *analogon*.

Now I will try to understand how theorists of what I call the "Hard-network", relates on the topics and notions previously discussed. In addition to the well-known philosophy of cinema of Gilles Deleuze, also Félix Guattari developed an insightful analysis of the moving image as a subjectivizing device. In one of his latter books, Guattari alludes to a theory of polyphonic and televisual subjectivation without a strictly involvement with the dynamics of sight. For Guattari the process of becoming-subject enlarges within an ecological array as it embodies:

the ensemble of conditions which render possible the emergence of individual and/or collective instances as self-referential existential Territories, adjacent, or in a delimiting relation, to an alterity that is itself subjective.<sup>8</sup>

In the case of audiovisual experience, Guattari exemplifies how trajectories of subjectivation arise at the intersection of (i) a perceptual fascination, (ii) a double-awareness of the narrative content and of the surrounding environment, and (iii) a phantasmatic presence which occupies the daydream (similar of what Sartre calls "imagining consciousness").<sup>9</sup> Herein Guattari combines strands of theories of *dispositif* (with a clearly references to Foucault) with the early theories of embodied cognition and dynamical systems. In Guattari's *Chaosmosis*, what is largely taken as an example, then criticized and extended, is the concept of "autopoiesis"

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<sup>8</sup> Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). 9.

<sup>9</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm* 16-17.

developed by the Chilean biologists Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana. Here Guattari enucleates his idea of “autopoietic machine” as a “set of inter-relations of its components independent of the components themselves” that is some degrees, it is also open to and interact with other machines.<sup>10</sup> In fact, as autopoiesis seems to fit with the radical-political stances of autonomy and singularity, Guattari’s “allopoiesis” stands for a rethinking of autopoiesis towards a “more collective machinism, without delimited unity, whose autonomy accommodates diverse *medium of alterity*.”<sup>11</sup>

Herein what is at stake for Guattari is the epistemological shift from a universal “structure” to an ongoing de-constructible embodied medium-like “machine”. By sharing Varela and Maturana terminology, at the basis of such a subjectivation, that could be collective or individual, there is a pre-personal, “emergent self” which arises by the attunement of proprioceptive and exteroceptive corporeal schema with a “cultural unconscious” that forms an “incorporeal existential agglomeration”.<sup>12</sup> By taking the distance from Husserlian “eidetic reduction”, Guattari is arguably in line with Sartre’s phenomenology for it reassesses an object/subject coupling towards the recognition of an existential modeling system instead of a one-way bottom-up process.

Concurrently, Varela’s and Maturana’s studies provided proper grounding for the movement of embodied and distributed cognition as an alternative to cognitivist, functionalist and strong artificial intelligence theories. In regard of my topic, embodied cognition claims that consciousness has grounding in our very embodied experience, i.e. it arises through the co-

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<sup>10</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis* 39. For a first introduction of the notion of “autopoiesis” see Francisco J. Varela, *Principles of Biological Autonomy* (New York: North Holland, 1979).

<sup>11</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis* 40.

<sup>12</sup> Herein Guattari refers to Daniel Stern theory of ‘emergent self’ which stands for a ‘fractalization’ of Freudian and Lacanian ‘stages’, in favor of a superposing multiple unconscious strata which co-exist during the adult age. See Daniel Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

evolution of neural, cognitive and imaginative processes in accordance with the human musculoskeletal, somatosensory and proprioceptive system.<sup>13</sup>

Through embodiment, some authors reassess the “ecological” lessons of continental phenomenology but are also inclined to combine strands from various disciplines, including cybernetics, robotics and radical thought. Reworking on Dennett’s models of consciousness, for Andy Clark we are “natural-born cyborg” inasmuch our neuronal architecture is biologically equipped with an unusual (for other species) degree of cortical plasticity and a period of development and learning (childhood) that allow us to co-evolve and easily re-orientate our cognitive skills in respect of bodily and environmental change.<sup>14</sup> In analogy with Dennett’s “narrative self”, Clark’s idea of “soft self” interprets our being-in-the-world as a problem-solving system that arises from a complex matrix of brain, body and technology that, in certain degrees, could “extend” beyond the biological skin-and-skull boundary. Therefore, culture and technology are not simply a “prosthetic” extension of our brain-centered cognition, but are strictly “dovetailed” to our cognitive and existential scaffolding in a way that overcomes the artificial penetration (as in a classical cyberpunk scenario), in favor of a more distributed psycho-cognitive symbiotic relation. In this perspective our mind is malleable device that continuously expands or contract our intelligent system or the degree of human autopoiesis.<sup>15</sup> In a way filled out by Lacanian reminiscences, our linguistic system has arguably been the first cognitive technology, why:

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<sup>13</sup> For an essential overview of the different approaches and research fields on embodiment see Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991); Antonio R. Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999); George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic, 1999). Andy Clark, *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Andy Clark, *Natural-born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> As Clark points out, the physical substrate of conscious mind still resides in the brain whereas future fast bandwidth brain-machine interface might physically extend the “machinery” of consciousness. See Andy Clark, “Spreading the Joy? Why the Machinery of Consciousness is (Probably) Still in the Head,” *Mind* 118: 472 (2009): 963-993.

Many of our tools are not just external props or aids but they are deep and integral parts of the problem-solving system we now know as human intelligence. Such tools are best conceived as proper parts of the *computational apparatus* that constitutes our minds.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, for Dennett, strategies of verbal self-stimulation have modified during the evolution the “internal communicative structure of our brains”; by “talking to himself” - Dennett explains - *homo sapiens* learned to connect “virtual wires” between brain’s subsystems that evolution may have not linked and our brain (an unconscious hardware of parallel computing) has been “infected” by a self-sustained serial “virtual machine.”<sup>17</sup> What seems close to a cyberpunk scenario, is indeed closely to the concept of “technology” and *dispositif* developed by Michel Foucault in his late studies on the “technologies of self.”<sup>18</sup> Literally, Foucault’s technologies of self are apparatuses “which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being.”<sup>19</sup> Thus “technology” refers to the interlinked relationship between devices (diaries, letter-writing and other techniques of externalization of thought), discourses (Medical examination, Christian confession, and practice of pleasure’s disciplining) and more “invisible” practice of subjectivation (mnemonics and self-examination techniques, imaginary ethics’ cases etc.). Moreover, Foucault’s emphasis on the role of sexuality as a historically situated

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<sup>16</sup> Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs* 5-6.

<sup>17</sup> Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* 210.

<sup>18</sup> See Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984). Michel Foucault, Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1988); Michel Foucault, Frédéric Gros, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1981-1982* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> Foucault, *Technologies of the Self* 18.



form of experience and a peculiar dimension of thought, advocates how the “relation to the self in the experience of the flesh” is technological, instead of a biological one.<sup>20</sup>

What seems evident for those authors is that “technology” (as mental as physical) shapes our mind, self and phenomenal events, and can be embodied and installed without the grafting of a cyborg-like components. My claim is that cinema and optical apparatuses may represent a paradigmatic technology for the scaffolding and the phenomenological modulation of conscious experience.

We can find a significantly example of such assumption, in the work of German media theorist Friedrich Kittler as he refers to Nietzsche as “the first mechanized philosopher.” For Kittler the decision of Nietzsche of using in 1882 one of the first prototypes of typewriter in order to compensate his half-blindness condition also affected his way of thinking. In fact, Hansen’s model of typewriter didn’t allow the writer to instantaneously look at his word, forcing the execution of a form of blind-writing. Kittler notes how such a new writing technique, influenced Nietzsche’s literature, shifting from the use of arguments to aphorism, from thoughts to puns.<sup>21</sup> With such suggestions, Kittler concludes that “we knew nothing about our senses until media provided models and metaphors.”<sup>22</sup> In a cognitive perspective, radical changing in perception (from visual to tactile) and action (from writing to typing) arguably produced a remodulation of a2 processes which in turn affect Nietzsche’s a1-based thinking experience.

In a quite opposing view in respect of Crary, for Kittler the passage from literature to photography/moving picture produced an epistemological breakthrough by conceiving our mind as a *camera obscura*, an oculo-centric device that (more or less automatically) introjects a

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<sup>20</sup> Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* 339.

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich A. Kittler and Anthony Enns, *Optical Media: Berlin Lectures 1999* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010) 202-203.

<sup>22</sup> Kittler, *Optical Media* 35.

*representation* of the outside world. Arguably, around the invention and diffusion of early cinema (1895-1914) arose a new concept of “consciousness” which involved almost simultaneously (i) the institution of physiology, psychology and psychoanalysis (1890s-1900s circa), (ii) the worldwide diffusion of a collective political consciousness disclosed by Marx and (iii) the end of a god-like consciousness operated by Nietzsche. Notably, in 1892 William James got a picture of the unity of the stream of consciousness as a series of single phenomenal states which pass one after the other, clearly resembling the functioning of cinematic apparatus and the theory of persistence of vision. Similarly, Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) enlarges the domain of phenomenological inquiry towards a quasi-conscious experience: the dream.

Significantly, in his *A Note upon the “Mystic Writing-Pad”* (1925), Freud tries to understand the functioning of human perceptual system and the role of consciousness through an optical technical metaphor. Freud’s magic pad presupposes the idea that conscious states arise from a discontinuous overlapping of perceptual “strata” that, according to his theory of unconscious, would erupts from the inside and briefly reaches the awareness of the subject. Even if Freud doesn’t refer to cinematic apparatus, his magic pad resembles the *camera obscura*/magic lantern binding. In fact, Freud’s “magic pad” is a device for the storage and “representation” of trace of perceptual stimuli in which resides two kind of awareness: a conscious awareness (as the very act of writing upon the pad) and an unconscious awareness (as a multiple traces saved on the waxed paper that – magically! – pop out).<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, in 1873 Nietzsche compares human consciousness with a “Bewusstheitszimmer” (Awareness Room) whereby “if man could escape from the prison walls of this faith, his ‘self-consciousness’ would be immediately destroyed.”<sup>24</sup> However Nietzsche

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<sup>23</sup> For an alternative reading of Freud as a media theorist, see Thomas Elsaesser, “Freud as Media Theorist: mystic writing-pads and the matter,” *Screen* 50:1 (2009): 102-113.

<sup>24</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, Raymond Geuss, and Ronald Speirs, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

recognizes how the Truth is nothing more than a spinning a web of metaphors residues: “whereas the bee builds with wax that he gathers from nature, man builds with the far more delicate *conceptual material* which he first has to manufacture from himself.”<sup>25</sup> Significantly, both Freud and Nietzsche uses optical media’s metaphors for their theories of consciousness.

This emphasis on the epistemological role of the metaphor, has reached particular attention in the studies of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson on the body-based “conceptual metaphors.” In their challenge to the Western thought, Lakoff’s and Johnson’s claim that human thinking is fundamentally grounded on its body structure. As Western philosophy has made use of an *a priori* categories to make sense of the body, instead there are evidences that human reasoning is shaped by the activity of our sensorimotor system, which provides the unconscious basis for our everyday perception of what is real.<sup>26</sup> We are inclined, Lakoff and Johnson argue, to understand sensing reality by “projecting” the structure of our motor-control system: “Our bodies define a set of fundamental spatial orientation that we use not only in orienting ourselves, but in perceiving the relationship of one object to another.”<sup>27</sup> As I mentioned before, is not just Western ideology that forged a representationalist notion of mind, then is our very primitive relationship with the bodily functions like perceiving, moving, manipulating, eating and procreating which affords such a metaphoric conceptual system.<sup>28</sup>

For Lakoff and Johnson the Anglo-American philosophical metaphor ‘The Mind Is A Computer’ stemmed from a linguistic shift in conceiving ‘Thought As Language’, which in turn,

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<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings* 9.

<sup>26</sup> See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic, 1999).

<sup>27</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh* 34.

<sup>28</sup> Through two quite opposite approaches, Vivian Sobchack and Torben Grodal employee the embodied categories to emphasize the coupling role of neo-cortical/conscious reasoning and sub-cortical/unconscious emotional system in sustaining the spectatorial experience. See Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts. Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004); Torben Grodal, *Embodied Visions. Evolution, Emotion, Culture, and Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

is grounded in the basic-level concept of “Thinking Is Object Manipulation”. In regards of technology, it is not just the physical augmentation of our perceptual and manipulative possibilities, but it could provide a very extension of the range of our embodied categories. If such conceptual metaphors are an embodied techno-cultural constructs, then it is not risky to say that our embodiment in a technical media environment could not being confined into a “skull and bones” schema.

In providing metaphors for human cognition and consciousness, optical technical media really influence our phenomenological life, rather than just give an extension of senses or a procedural off-loading of cognitive activities. Rather than being based on transcendental categories of experience, our sense of what-is-likeness as well as our sense of perception and agency, is extremely transient and susceptible of environmental change.

In conclusion, I argue that cinematic apparatuses actively articulated new embodied metaphors such as “The Mind Is A Screen” and “Consciousness Is a Movie’ that worked through different cinematic *dispositifs* (early, classical, modern and post-classical) and which provides a genuine extension of mind-body, orients our awareness system and consequently, operates a cognitive distribution of our Self. In today’s ubiquitous display environment our sense of self is fragmented as well as our body-image, resembling the condition of the early modern experience of “attraction.”<sup>29</sup> Only in this sense cinema and optical technical media enhance a consciousness-modulation which might have irremediably affected our way of being-in-the-world. In line with our cross-disciplinary understanding of “technology”, optical *dispositifs* traverse and extend our bodily experience without penetrating the flesh. Our being in the world has to be intended as a “technological practice”, whereas, in the age of an even more context-aware environment, also technological devices and apparatuses reach the status of performative agencies. The prolonged *use* of moving-images as an epistemic tool for mind extension and the continuous shifting of

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<sup>29</sup> See Tom Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator,” *Art & Text* 34(1989).

awareness and the fluctuation of presence among synthetic environments attunes our very sense of what-is-likeness.

A new archaeology of moviegoing is thus necessary in order to drive out new epistemologies which can help us in understanding the history and the evolution of our overwhelming bio-technological existence.

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## THE DECLINE OF HOLLYWOOD NARRATIVES: HOW THE INTERNET IS SHAPING THE CREATION AND APPRECIATION OF FILM

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In November 2012 A.O. Scott and Manohla Dargis, two of the most prominent New York Times film critics, published a joint review of a number of recent films, which included *Cloud Atlas* and *The Master*, entitled “When Do we ‘Get It?’”<sup>1</sup> The aim of the article was to question the “box office” success of films that, unlike most examples of popular filmmaking, lack a recognizable narrative structure. Despite often reaching the status of cult films, these films defy the causal narrative structure that has long been regarded, to adopt Noël Carroll’s expression, as one of the features behind the “power of movies.” This phenomenon has recently been acknowledged by narrative theorists and film scholars who have begun to classify these films as “puzzle narratives,” “mind game films,” etc. These analyses focus on the narrative innovations presented by such films, and yet, they often fall short of explaining the popular success, and the apparent ease with which the audience is embracing them. My solution takes a different direction that stems from an analysis of the cognitive mechanisms behind the understanding of both causal and complex (or puzzle) narratives. The success of these films depends, I will argue, on the decline of the cognitive causal mechanism of narrative, and on the rise of new cognitive forms of understanding and appraisal that are largely based on digital and interactive features of communication, among which, and primarily, Internet networks.

It is widely assumed that the historical evolution of film cannot be detached from economic, technological, historical, and social changes. My paper introduces a new factor: changes in the narrative construction of film are caused by cognitive changes in the audience’s neuropsychology and behavior, and should thus be explained.

In November 2012 A.O. Scott and Manohla Dargis, two New York Times film critics, published a joint review of a number of recent films, including *Cloud Atlas*, *The Master*, and *Holy Motors* entitled “When Do We ‘Get It?’”<sup>2</sup> The aim of the article was to question the “box office” success of films that, differently from more predictably successful movies, do not rely on a recognizable narrative structure.

The virtual absence of explicit narrative connections is regarded as a hindrance to the mass audience appreciation of film, and it is usually not a component (or perhaps, being an

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/25/movies/films-dispense-with-storytelling-conventions.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/25/movies/films-dispense-with-storytelling-conventions.html?pagewanted=all>

absence, a “non-component”), of largely successful films. There are reasons for this. As Noël Carroll argues in his analysis of mass art and in his account of Hollywood International films,<sup>3</sup> the “power” of movies is largely based (together with pictorial representation and variable framing) on the adoption of a causal narrative dynamic: a narrative that facilitates and eases the viewing and appreciation of film. What glues the audience to the screen is the tightly linked progression of logically related scenes, the suspense and thrill accompanying the resolution of a mystery, and the sense of finality and emotional resolution of a powerful ending.

Yet, the question that concerns me is not why a standard narrative attracts the audience, but why changes, or even the absence of such a narrative can lead to the same result. The main goal of this article is to attempt an explanation of why not only the mass audience is becoming accustomed to movies that defy standard narrative conventions, but why it is also, and importantly, enjoying them a great deal.

I will begin with a few general considerations on the relation between narrative, cognition, and understanding. Such considerations will help me frame and review, in the second part of the essay, a number of accounts that have tried to define, classify, and interpret the nature and the effects of such films. My goal is to contribute to this debate through an analysis of the relation between the appreciation of film and the cognitive changes introduced by predominant technologies such as the Internet. The success of complex narratives depends, I will argue, on the partial decline of the cognitive causal mechanism of narrative, and on the rise of new cognitive forms of understanding and appraisal shaped by the digital and interactive features of communication in our multitasking Internet age.

It is widely assumed that the historical evolution of film cannot be detached from economic, technological, historical, and social changes. My paper suggests a further trajectory:

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<sup>3</sup> Noël Carroll, “The Power of Movies,” *Daedalus* 114.4, The Moving Image (Fall, 1985): 79-103.

changes in the narrative construction of film are caused by cognitive changes in the audience's neuropsychology and behavior, and should thus be explained.

### 1. Narrative and Cognition

I am, in this article, committed to the discussion of recent films that display structural conditions that differ from what are usually taken to be the standard conditions of narrative. The notion of "standard narrative" I am referring to relies on a rather skeletal set of narrative conditions that are largely derived from one of the first discussions of narrative, namely, Aristotle's treatment of the plot as one of the six elements of tragedies.

The idea that the plot of a tragedy has to be divided in three parts – beginning, middle, and end – that the middle should be characterized by the mechanism of reversal and recognition, and that the end should convey a "sense of an ending" while simultaneously enticing catharsis is the historical, cultural, and philosophical basis for virtually any debate on the nature of narrative.

Narratives are also, needless to say, a crucial component of film. Philosophers and theorists, as for instance Seymour Chatman, David Bordwell, and Noël Carroll, see in the presence of narrative connections one of the strongest and most relevant features of film.

In his essay "The Power of Movies,"<sup>4</sup> Carroll maintains that the success of Hollywood International Films (films that even though might be produced outside of Hollywood retain Hollywood-like features in terms of production, cast, etc.) is in part attributable to the presence of an erotetic narrative. The narrative structure of a film is based on a chain of micro-questions and on one macro-question the film has to respond to. These questions are related causally, and their resolution is meant to lead to a satisfactory ending.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

I tend to favor Carroll's solution, and I endorse his use of causality as the driving force of narrative. Specifically, my agreement is based on the fact that causality is analyzed not as an imposed relation, but as a cognitive mechanism. Our reliance on causal mechanisms is, as Hume explained, at the basis of the way in which we analyze experience and develop expectations.<sup>5</sup> Simply put, causal connections are relevant because without them we would not be able to fully make sense of things; we need causality because we are unable to accept, perhaps correctly, that life might just be a string of unrelated events haphazardly put together.

Further evidence of the cognitive power of narrative and narrative connections comes from their function as an evolutionary feature of our species. This is not to say, as Stephen Davies rightly highlights, that fictional narratives, such as the ones found in film, are adaptive products, but that there is something, in our ability to construct and engage in narratives, that is essential to our evolution and to the way we understand and express ourselves to others:

The centrality of narrative to our ways of making sense of the world and our place in it is undeniable and pervasive. Every person constructs a story about who he or she is, emphasizing this, downplaying that. Everyone who seeks connections between the past, present, and future provides an historical story to tie them together.<sup>6</sup>

Narratives developed to make sense of everyday life, to foster organization and coherency; furthermore, the evolutionary basis of our reliance on narrative connections also leads to their presupposition and anticipation in the overall context of experience. Narrative connections have, in this sense, come to be perceived as “expected,” thus making us project their presence in past, present, and future events – as in the case of counterfactual thinking.

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<sup>5</sup> However, it should be noted how for Hume our reliance of induction cannot be trusted when aiming at true and justified beliefs.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Davies, *The Artful Species* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 164.

This latter intuition, namely the idea according to which we anticipate and expect the presence of narrative connections in everyday life is central to the understanding of filmic narratives, and it has been documented in a number of studies<sup>7</sup> on narrative and narrative cognition. Zacks and Magliano, for instance, examine the understanding of narratives – their case of study is *The Red Balloon* (Lamoris, 1956) – under the lens of editing cuts. In light of behavioral and neurological data, Zacks and Magliano point to how our vision is bound to understand a story as a flowing continuum despite its being practically, and technically, a combination of hundreds, if not thousands of camera shots. What allows for such coherent understanding, the authors argue, is the natural segmentation we commonly exercise in the perception of everyday experience, or what might be referred to as a cognitive and ongoing “editing” of reality. Lastly, it is important to notice, for reasons that will soon become evident, that Zacks and Magliano rely, for their conclusions, on the way in which events are naturally understood in everyday life *independently* from their “filmic” or “nonfilmic” setting: conceptual changes such as causal connections and character goals are perceived as important because they are *already* recognized as important in everyday reality. As they explain:

Some cuts may “work” (depending on how they are executed), because human perceptual systems are already segmenting ongoing activity into discrete events all the time. If a cut is placed where the observer would naturally segment the activity, then the cut will be experienced as natural even if it is readily detectable.<sup>8</sup>

Zacks and Magliano’s study is based on standard narrative films, and yet, I believe it can be extended to films that do not follow such a structure. My claim is that “complex narratives,” in a way that is almost analogous to standard narratives, depend, for their understanding and

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<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey M. Zacks and Joseph P. Magliano, “Film, Narrative, and Cognitive Neuroscience,” *Art & The Senses*, ed. David P. Melcher and Francesca Bacci (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

enjoyment, on the way in which we cognize and perceive everyday life. What makes complex narratives puzzling is then not their construction, but changes in everyday cognition: to properly understand their success, we thus need to investigate the way in which we perceive everyday reality. However, before advancing my hypothesis, it is important to include a short digression on some of the definitions of what, in the opening of this article, I introduced as complex or “puzzle” narratives.

## 2. Complex Storytelling

The analysis of films that elude standard narrative connections is a burgeoning topic of discussion in film theory. Scholars are, through these debates, trying to understand the impact of a number of “complex” films produced in Europe, North America, and Asia that, since the 1990s, have become increasingly popular among movie-goers, and that, in certain cases, have assumed the status of cult films.

David Bordwell’s “Film Futures”<sup>9</sup> stands as one of the first proposed analyses. Starting from Aristotle’s conception of the plot, and highlighting the interwoven plotlines resulting from the mechanism of reversal and recognition (*peplegmenos*), Bordwell derives the notion of “forking paths.” Forking paths can be utilized in a number of ways: they bifurcate from the main plot line, run parallel to it, depend on each other, and eventually intersect.

But despite their “structural fluidity,” forking paths are not regarded by Bordwell as significantly departing from the canon of standard narratives. As he explains, the changes introduced by forking paths are limited to the addition of an extra (or several) causal plotlines, thus simply stretching and enriching the folk-psychological basis of narrative and its adherence

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<sup>9</sup> David Bordwell, “Film Futures,” *Substance* 31.1, Issue 97: Special Issue: The American Production of French Theory (2002): 88-104.

to causal mechanisms. Complex storytelling does not demolish standard narrative conventions: it builds upon them.

Bordwell's notion of forking paths has come into question. Warren Buckland, one of the leading critics of Bordwell's account, argues that the level of complexity featured by the films in question is not reducible to a quantitative addition of plotlines. What makes complex storytelling truly "complex" is instead the presence of *structurally perplexing* connections. It is to capture the nature of such connections that Buckland's preferred term to describe complex storytelling is "Puzzle Plots:"

The "puzzle plot" is, I would argue, the third type of plot that comes after the complex plot. A puzzle plot is intricate in the sense that the arrangement of events is not just complex, but complicated and perplexing: the events are not simply interwoven, but entangled.<sup>10</sup>

Puzzle plots belong to a "post-classical" mode of film representation. On the one hand, post-classical films feature non-classical characters performing non-classical activities. Several of these films feature psychologically unstable characters, unknown motivations for action (at least until the end), paranoid and manic behaviors, examples of supernatural intelligence, etc. On the other hand, films are post-classical when they break linearity. An episodic time setting is usually preferred to diachronic narration, spaces are ambiguously located between the real and the imaginary; frequent is also the adoption of time loops, and there is a strong insistence on the mechanisms, but also on the fallibility, and tricks, of memory.

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<sup>10</sup> Warren Buckland, ed. *Puzzle Films. Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) 3.

A third account, proposed by Thomas Elsaesser, opts for yet another definition: Mind Game Films. Borrowing Truffaut's famous expression,<sup>11</sup> Elsaesser summarizes the presence, innovative quality, and relevance of complex narratives as "a certain tendency" in contemporary cinema. Mind Game Films can be divided into three categories. First, the mind game film "comprises movies that are 'playing games,' and this at two levels: there are films in which a character is being played games with, without knowing it or without knowing who it is that is playing these."<sup>12</sup> Films of this kind include Jonathan Demme's *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), David Fincher's *Se7en* (1995), and Peter Weir's *The Truman Show* (1998). A second category comprises "films where it is the audience that is played games with, because certain crucial information is withheld or ambiguously presented."<sup>13</sup> David Lynch's *Mulholland Dr.* (2001) and *Inland Empire* (2006) are examples of this kind, and so are Charlie Kaufman's *Being John Malkovich* (1999) and *Adaptation* (2002). Lastly, the "mind-game tendency puts the emphasis on 'mind:' they feature central characters whose mental condition is extreme, unstable, or pathological; yet, instead of being examples of case studies, their ways of seeing, interaction with other characters, and their 'being in the world' are presented as normal."<sup>14</sup> Elsaesser mentions, among others, Richard Kelly's *Donnie Darko* (2001) and the Wachowski Brothers' *The Matrix* (1999).

It is this latter point, namely the attention given to psychology and the mind that, I believe, deserves to be further analyzed – but with a twist. Rather than simply concentrating on the complex minds of characters and on the inevitable effects that such minds have on the categorization and classification of a given film, we may want to contemplate the possibility of

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<sup>11</sup> I am here referring to Truffaut's 1954 letter to the *Cahiers du Cinéma* in which he referred to a "certain tendency" in French filmmaking.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, "The Mind-Game Film," *Puzzle Films. Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*, ed. Warren Buckland (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009)14.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem* 14.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem* 14.



an alternative explanation, namely that the complex mind in question might be the mind of the *very audience* who is watching these films.

In what follows, I will outline an interpretation of the films in question that, while sharing a number of elements with Bordwell, Buckland, and Elsaesser's accounts, differs from them in its problematization of the cognitive mechanisms that underline the understanding and appreciation of narrative. I argue that what characterizes a number of recent films (independently from their definition as forking path narratives, puzzle films, or mind-game films) is the adoption of new narrative conventions that defy causal connections and that rely instead on recent cognitive changes that have been introduced by new media. New media, such as the Internet, are changing the way we understand reality and, with it, the way in which we cognize, but also enjoy, film.

### 3. Changes in Cognition, Changes in Narrative

In the previous sections of this article I emphasized how the structure of narrative, and narratives per se, are based on the ways in which our cognition works. We engage in narrative, and we are attracted to it, because of narrative's adoption of cause-effect dynamics, relations that are perceived as crucial in the understanding of reality. And yet, this very assumption might be in need of further clarification. Specifically, as anticipated in the opening of this article, we should account, when considering the understanding of narrative, for the changes that the Internet Age has brought to the very perception of reality and of its experiential content.

Marshall McLuhan's famous motto "the medium is the message,"<sup>15</sup> made in reference to the effects of electronic technology (radio and television), is today often regarded as a prophecy foreshadowing the influence of the Internet on society. McLuhan focused on social, economic, and cultural changes, but also, importantly for our purposes, on how technology can change us

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<sup>15</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).

*directly* by affecting how we act and understand. An analysis of the Internet and its effects on cognition follows, I believe, from this intuition.

In his book, *The Shallows. What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*,<sup>16</sup> Nicholas Carr classifies the Internet as an “intellectual technology.” Unlike technologies which goal is to improve our strength, reshape nature, or sharpen our sensibility, intellectual technologies are tools that “extend or support our mental power.” Human history has encountered a number of such technologies, and all of them have led to social, but also to conspicuous cognitive alterations: from the map and the clock, technologies responsible for the organization, respectively, of space and time, to Gutenberg’s printing machine in 1445, to, inevitably, the Internet.

The Internet is responsible, according to Carr, for radical changes in the modalities of our cognition. Carr’s “Juggler’s Brain” – to adopt his expression – has lost, because of the enormously large amount of scattered information it is supposed to process, the ability to fully concentrate and to engage in deep thinking. The fast, multi-sensorial stimuli received, hyperlinks, and the constant appearance of new windows stress our working memory to an excessive extent, thus depriving us of the time needed to solidify its precious, but still frail content in the set of organizational schema that characterize long-term memory. We learn more, but we retain considerably less. Carr’s verdict is, to summarize, fully negative: the Internet is numbing us and making us lose those capacities for concentration, analysis, and deep thinking that have long been considered essential to our cognitive development.

Not everyone shares Carr’s dark perspective. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Internet enthusiasts such as Clay Shirky<sup>17</sup> point to how the cognitive changes brought by the Internet might function as our new strength. Focusing on Internet enabled behaviors, from

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<sup>16</sup> Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows. What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: Norton, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Clay Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus. Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2010).

personal creativity, to the possibility of interacting on a global level, Shirky emphasizes how the Internet has promoted new cognitive developments such as improved problem-solving abilities, speed, and the capacity to link information more effectively.

However, it is not the goal of this paper to gauge whether the effects of the Internet on our cognition are positive or negative. What is instead worth paying attention to is how it is virtually undeniable that the Internet, the most powerful intellectual technology to date, is, to a large extent, “re-wiring” our brains and altering not only our social, but also our cognitive capabilities. It is my belief that these capabilities include, as anticipated, the ability to understand narratives. Let me now turn to this problem.

#### **4. When Do We Get it?**

At the beginning of this article I pointed, with Lackoff and Magliano, to the connection between the understanding of narrative in film and to the way in which narratives are identified and expected in everyday life. It is precisely such a connection that has been challenged and potentially altered by what I have succinctly sketched as some of the effects of the Internet on cognition. Simply put: if the understanding of narratives is based on the understanding of daily life, and if the understanding of daily life has changed because of the Internet, would it be possible to further infer that the understanding of narratives has also morphed in light of this new understanding of reality?

My proposal is that such changes are among the reasons behind the success of complex narratives, and the explanation for why such films are neither odd nor obtrusive, but rather entertaining and compelling. But, one might ask, how are we to account for the physiology of these changes?

A promising hypothesis, recently advocated by Stanislas Dehaene<sup>18</sup> can help us answer this question. The core of Dehaene's hypothesis is that certain cognitive changes might be related to the phenomenon known as "neural recycling." Developed in connection to reading and arithmetic, the neural recycling hypothesis aims at explaining the flexibility of our cognitive responses to the problems posed by cultural tools. Cultural tools such as reading and arithmetic require learning how to master complex symbolic systems in a relatively short period of time, a learning process that, according to Dehaene, can only be explained and understood if we conceive of the possibility of a "recycling" of pre-existing neural circuits.

There are at least two significant advantages to this hypothesis. First, it is able to explain sophisticated symbolic abilities that could not, because of obvious time concerns, be explained as evolutionary products. Second, the neural recycling hypothesis gives us sufficient ground to believe that such changes can occur on a large scale, thus ruling out the all too common reliance on neuroplasticity – a feature of the brain that, albeit crucial, is better applied at the level of the individual than in relation to large groups of people such as the contemporary audience of film.

It is in light of these findings that we can begin to speculate on a possible parallel with the Internet, and see, in the cognitive changes introduced by the Internet, something analogous to the recycling of previous functions. As seen, the Internet has introduced radically new ways of processing and connecting information: ways that are likely to have an impact on the understanding of narratives and narrative connections. Such modalities, I propose, are not only particularly visible in complex narrative films, they might also be regarded as the very reason for their enjoyment.

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<sup>18</sup> S. Dehaene, J.R. Duhamel, M. Hauser and G. Rizzolatti, eds. *From Monkey Brain to Human Brain* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004).

Recent complex narratives, in a way that closely resembles Internet networks, are characterized by the partial, if not full, dismissal of causality and diachronicity, and by its substitution with a form of “episodic browsing.” Films such as *Holy Motors* and *Cosmopolis*, are significant examples of this new trajectory. Somewhat similar in their structure, both films feature a series of episodes and encounters that are either taking place in the back seat of a limousine, or juxtaposed to it. The connections among the episodes are never fully fleshed out, and causal links are substituted with free associations, rapid interventions, and with the presentation of fantastically new characters and scenarios. In *Cosmopolis*, the relation to the digital world is made explicit from the very first encounters; even the most futile of activities, getting a haircut (which is however the only identifiable goal of the film), is described as a way of developing “associations.”

The only apparent way to follow the threads of characters and episodes is to rely on the searching and shifting patterns of the main characters, Monsieur Oscar, played by Denis Lavant, in *Holy Motors*, and Eric Packer, played by an eerie Robert Pattinson, in *Cosmopolis*. It is their characters, their status as browsers and searchers that engages us; we are driven by them and driving with them at once, forced into a connection, as if affinity and empathy could be locked in the back seat of a limousine, and thus ensured.

The affinity we feel for them is only tangentially of moral or emotional nature, nor does it seem to rely on standard make-believe mechanisms. Their brief encounters with others can strike as arbitrary, and yet they remain vivid even in their most oneiric aspects, significant for always-elusive reasons. In the back of the limousine, Monsieur Oscar and Eric Packer are virtually alone, acting upon their intentions in a way that is meant to escape the audience, and often their very driver. Both characters accept reality and life as a form of browsing; they accept the constant segmentation of linearity; the idea of searching, of steady movement across space and time, and the visual, and often virtual and post-human aesthetics that is injected into every scene.

And yet, Monsieur Oscar and Eric Packer, together with the structure of these two films do not alienate the audience: they engage it. We do not question the breaking of linearity, space and time anomalies, not even the inaccessibility of a stable character profile: we understand it. But what is mainly important to notice, is that this understanding, what I before regarded as an “affinity” is, for the most part, effortless. Differently from the definitions proposed in the second part of this paper, the audience is not trying to make sense of complex causal relations, nor is it confronted with particularly perplexing questions. The audience is instead accepting the dynamics of these films exactly as they accept the browsing activity, the episodic nature, and the quick, short-term connections that characterize daily Internet searches.

To conclude, it might be possible to abandon the discussion on structural complexity, and to emphasize instead the cognitive immediacy of these films. Narratives depend, for their understanding, on cognitive mechanisms that are already in place in everyday life. And yet, as seen, much has changed in our daily cognitive activities. The complexity of so-called “complex films” is today matched by the increasing complexity of the minds of the contemporary audience, thus making them, from a cognitive standpoint, as enjoyable and effortless as examples of standard narratives – once again, the Internet made things easier

## FILM AS AN IMPOSSIBLE PERSPECTIVE ON REALITY

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As realistic as many films purport to be, one relatively unique feature of film is its ability to supply the audience with an impossible perspective on reality. In the sense, film unifies physically, geographically, or temporally separate parts of reality for the viewer. Something as simple as cuts from a scene to a scene at a later time transports the audience instantly across narratively unimportant moments or juxtaposes simultaneous events in different places. The cliché of switching between views of a ticking bomb and views of the people searching for it put the audience in a perspective no actual person could have. The audience can see ‘secret’ or private things in films – if an actual person were in the room when people were doing things like that, the behavior of those people would usually have been altered by having observers.

Film can insert us into tiny spaces – we can watch the short circuit cause a spark inside the spacecraft that leads to an explosion in *Apollo 13*, or watch deadly microscopic virus cells float through the air in a movie theater in *Outbreak*. We can view the mathematical calculations of Robert Downey Jr.’s rough and tumble Sherlock Holmes as he plans the perfect series of punches. We can see both the inside and outside of the submarine and the destroyer in war movies like *The Enemy Below*. But this begs the question, is reality a perspective-based thing, or a thing of the myriad of perspectives that film shows us. Is it showing us more of reality than anyone could normally see, or is it giving us an impossible view that transcends reality?

One of the distinctive features of motion pictures is their ability to transport the viewer to viewpoints and perspectives that are normally impossible for a human being to occupy. In some sense, most films do this, in that they cut from one scene to another in places and times and situations that the viewer is not present. We can see distant lands or times past or future, or see people and hear conversations to which we would not normally have access. But that overall common feature is not the point at issue here, because a person could go to that distant land, or could have been there (in that past time), or in many cases people were actually there, seeing and hearing those things. Similarly, we can switch between multiple perspectives, as in the movie cliché of switching between views of a ticking bomb and views of the people frantically searching for it, which puts the audience in a dual perspective no one actual person could have. The audience can see ‘secret’ or private things in films (sexual encounters, conspiratorial meetings, couples arguing in private) – if an actual person were in the room when people were

doing things like that, the behavior of those people would usually be altered or inhibited by having observers. But these also still involve seeing these things in the way a human being would, so they are still not really ‘impossible’ perspectives. Rather, the point here is film’s ability to put us in places we could never be, or at least never be and survive our presence there, and perspectives in time and space that humans cannot occupy. These include seeing through others’ eyes or viewpoints, seeing the world in a time frame either radically faster or slower than the human one, and moving through space in ways that people simply cannot actually move.

This is not to say that all films do this, or that they should. Many films, most dramas, comedies, romantic stories, and the like, are presented in a common human perspective, and seek to tell a story and show us human beings in a conventional viewpoint. Many of these films are great artistic achievements, and there is nothing wrong with using the common human perspective. But it is noteworthy to point out a specific technique that some films use that puts us beyond the common human perspective. Doing so does not guarantee high quality – some bad movies include these interesting viewpoints, but are otherwise crass, or boring, or stupid, or otherwise poorly done. Yet this special perspective, the impossible perspective, can provide new ways of seeing, and new ways of being in reality, that are unique to film.

We can divide the kinds of special viewpoints into various categories. One is simply: place. Not only can films (as they commonly do) put us in historical places, such as ancient Rome (*Gladiator*) or medieval England (*Elizabeth*, *Robin Hood*) or 19<sup>th</sup> century American slave plantation (*12 Years a Slave*) or in the midst of WWII (*Saving Private Ryan*, *Pearl Harbor*), even the primordial soup of earth a billion years ago when nothing but microorganisms existed (shown in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* finale episode ‘All Good Things...’(1994)), or in (possible) future places of science fiction films, but beyond these film can put us in places we could never stand. We can be up-close to the surface of the sun (*2012*) or the crushing depths of the bottom of the ocean (*The Abyss*) or under the mantle of the earth (*The Core*) or riding in the tail of a comet



(*Armageddon*, *Deep Impact*), or on the blazing hot and intensely dense atmosphere of Venus, or a planet whose surface alternates from dark and cold to fiery hot in a matter of minutes at sunrise (*The Chronicles of Riddick*). None of these are places a human being could be, or if we could get there, we couldn't survive. We can also see what it might be like to travel using a time machine through many different times (*The Time Machine*) – indeed films are a form of time machine, allowing us to see and hear at least what we imagine such past or future times were/will be like or might have been or become.

Another kind of impossible perspective film can give us is to allow us to see events that we either couldn't see or wouldn't survive seeing, such as the explosion of a supernova, or the shockwave of a star explosion destroying a planet (as we believe our sun may do to Earth in 5 billion years or so) (*Star Trek Generations*), or zooming through a wormhole in space (*Contact*, *Stargate*), or the destruction at the immediate vicinity of a nuclear blast (*Terminator II*, *Sum of All Fears*), or a volcanic eruption spewing out a pyroclastic cloud destroying everything in its path (2012, *Dante's Peak*), or a giant earthquake splitting the earth and devouring a whole city (2012), or an asteroid impact on earth causing enormous waves to wash over cities and continents, destroying everything in their paths (*Armageddon*, *Deep Impact*). We can see a frozen lake from underneath the ice (*King Arthur* (2004)) or a submarine being subjected to depth charges from the watery spot outside the sub (*U571*), or see subs shooting at each other from the torpedoes' perspective (*The Hunt for Red October*), or see the inside of a tornado (*Twister*). We know these events do occur in the world, but we either can't get ourselves there to see it, or (more likely) wouldn't want to, since in the course of seeing them we would be washed away, incinerated, crushed, or wiped out in some other gruesome manner. But we can get a glimpse of them in the safety of our local movie theaters or TVs through the special ability of film to take us there.

Films can also present altered views of time. Virtually all of them do this routinely in that they cut from scene to scene, year to year, and take us through stories omitting all the unnecessary, boring, or dramatically irrelevant parts. Almost no film is presented in ‘real time’, and any that were would likely be deadly dull. When you have only 2-3 hours to tell a story (or in the case of TV shows, usually 30-60 minutes), you need to display only the scenes that propel the story. Some films take their time and let us have a few extended relatively ‘real time’ scenes, while others, like action films and many recent quick-cut films, can’t seem to stay on one scene for more than 5 seconds (i.e. every *Star Wars* film). Many films also alternate between scenes, so we see glimpses of multiple threads of action at the same time.

Even those films that do cut between scenes in these ways still almost always show time flowing normally within each scene. But film can also alter the rate of flow of time with either slow motion, or rapid motion, or time lapses. These give the viewer a perspective on the events that no human being could ever have. Slow motion arrived early, and indeed there is a famous instance of slow motion allowing us to learn better how the normal world works – early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was examining the motion picture frames of a horse running that we learned that indeed at points in their gait, horses leave the ground entirely (something which humans could not detect when watching horses running in real time). Slow motion can let us see the intricacies of rapidly unfolding events in a way that such fine detail is lost when seeing them in real time from explosions and building demolition or plays in sporting events. In *Battleship* we get to see an artillery shell from the big gun of a battleship in slow-motion shooting out of the barrel – a viewpoint that, were one there, would be the last one would ever have, but moreover actually takes place so quickly that one could never see the detail of a shell rotating as it travels through the gun barrel. In *King Arthur*, we see Keira Knightley’s character shoot an arrow and we ride along with the flying arrow in flight to its unfortunate Viking target.

Slow motion replay is now a staple of televised sporting events, so much so that in at least one sport, American football, slow-motion replays have been incorporated into the judging of plays (but only in limited circumstances and a restricted number of replays in a game, so as not to slow down the action too much.) In one sense, American football was forced to incorporate video-reviews, because after incorrect calls by referees, entire stadiums were immediately after seeing the slow-motion replay on the Jumbotron TVs, and it was embarrassingly apparent that it was silly and unjust to allow obviously incorrect calls to stand uncorrected simply because the referees were restricted to using normal human perception of quick events. Other sports are now or will likely soon add replay reviews to their judging, taking advantage of this unique avenue of perception that video recording allows. In movies of sports, slow-motion footage has become a staple of the genre (*The Natural*, *For the Love of the Game*, *The Longest Yard*). One thing that this allows is a broadening of the dramatic tension of the event. Consider baseball – professional pitchers throw baseballs over 100mph, so fast that batters cannot actually ‘keep their eye in the ball’, and viewers see the pitch in a blur. Whether hit or miss, it happens fast – too fast to make a real dramatic moment in a film. But a slow motion scene of a baseball hit (or miss) elongates the dramatic moment when the game is won or lost in an instant. In *The Natural*, the slow motion hit unfolds like a primal event of nature, and the impact sound effect of the ball being hit is like a cannon shot instead of a mere instant crack. The runner rounds the bases in slow motion through the sparks of smashed lights floating gently to the ground, accompanied for the viewers by dramatic victory music. We see crowd reaction throughout the stadium in slow motion, and the event takes on much greater significance than it would in the 10 or 15 seconds of real time action. The joy of the celebrating winning team can be scrutinized and they run and jump in slow motion, and the scene takes on an entirely different feel than it would have in real time. In *For the Love of the Game*, where Kevin Costner’s hero is the pitcher instead of the batter, the slow motion shows us the intricacies of the throw, and the ball hits the catcher’s glove with an explosive impact. In the final football play of *The Longest Yard* (1974), we see the play in slow

motion and hear close-up grunting of players and the bruising impacts of individual blocks, and this allows us to understand, in much more detail than real time allows, how violent and powerful the impacts in football really are.

Explosions in action movies are also things directors (especially in Hollywood) like to slow down. In *Swordfish* we see the individual ball bearings wrapped around a terrorist bomb cutting their deadly paths through cars and people and we have a viewpoint into flying debris that would in real time happen in a flash. And we can see the details of such an explosion without being blow up ourselves. In Guy Richie's first film of as *Sherlock Holmes* (2009, with Robert Downey Jr. playing Holmes), an explosion happens in super slow motion, so we can see the dance of the flames, the chaotic flying around of individual bits of wood and metal, and see clearly how the clever Holmes, in an instant of ingenious thinking, grabs a 4 foot square piece of wood board to shield himself from the full force of the blast. There are many films, both real-life and cinematic with special effects, of buildings being demolished by explosion. It is fascinating to watch such demolition of an old building in slow motion – we see the exact order of collapse of floors and supports, and see exactly how a few well-placed charges can subvert the concrete structure. These details are missed when viewing it in real-time, and film is our only way of seeing this detailed perspective. Indeed, even something as common as a human face can take on different impact when viewed in slow motion. Watching a neutral expression in slow motion can give it tragic overtones that are lacking in real time, and even watching a happy face in silent slow motion can add a melancholic effect, as if to show us that the joy felt and now slowly scrutinized is fleeting, and the inevitable fading of the happiness is on its way. In *Koyaanisqatsi*, the entire film works mostly because of altered time, so we can see nature and technology in slow motion, and then in fast motion. The contrasts are that much more we can see vivid. Seeing a nighttime cityscape of cars whizzing by makes them look like bees buzzing about, and emphasizes the perpetual motion of any large city. Watching people going up and down escalators in fast motion makes the human forms blur and the masses of humanity begin to look like waves of strange objects waxing and

waning. These effects might perhaps be noticed viewing things in real time (and presumably director Godfrey Reggio noticed them before film, though perhaps not), but on time altered film the effects are either created or greatly magnified.

Films can also alter the size-frame of perception. It can fit us into tight spaces, as when, for example, *Apollo 13* director Ron Howard lets us watch and travel down the wire in the inner workings of the Apollo 13 spacecraft leading to the faulty connection, and see the infamous malfunction from a minute viewpoint, leading to the explosion that endangered the lives of the three astronauts. In *Fantastic Voyage*, we can see the inside of a human body (as envisioned by the makers of the film) from a miniature perspective. We can float through blood vessels, wander between internal tissues, float by giant-looking blood cells, and meander between neurons. We are there – inside a body, in a way that (unless someone invents an actual miniaturization device) we could never actually perceive the world. Of course, *Fantastic Voyage* was a written story before being a film, but the film takes us into the minute world in a way that the story could only suggest. In a scene in *The Fifth Element* we can get to see the world from a cockroach eye view, via a cockroach with a miniature video camera (until it gets squashed under a shoe). In *Star Trek The Motion Picture* (1979), we get to see for the first time how big the USS Enterprise was really supposed to be (for the effects in the original 1966-69 *Star Trek* TV series were unable to show us such detail), and then have the starship be dwarfed by entering the impossibly large cloud around the alien entity 'Vger'. (Of course, it is generally agreed that director Robert Wise included so much time indulging in such shots of the ship that they bogged down the dramatic action and made for a tedious film. So this is also a cautionary tale on using effects at the expense of pacing). In a scene that plays with size and motion, the end of *Men in Black* has the viewpoint retreat from an aerial city street scene to an overview of the planet to zooming out into space to a cosmic dust view to a view of the entire Milky Way galaxy in a few seconds. Given that light takes 8 minutes to travel from the sun to the earth, this is a speed of retreat that is many thousands of times the speed of light – a speed that, according to Einstein, is utterly impossible

for anyone to actually achieve. In a humorous fanciful addition, our galaxy is then turned into a spherical marble which is the plaything of impossibly large alien beings and stuffed into a bag – we can see a viewpoint from a gargantuan perspective that (I assume) doesn't exist on the part of any actually existing creature.

Film also affords viewers entry into internal viewpoints. In *Being John Malkovich* we get to, well, BE John Malkovich – to see from his eyes. In *Jaws* we see from the shark-eye-view, and in *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Deep Impact*, we are inside the astronauts' helmets with them. Film also shows us non-human perspectives. In *Westworld*, the robot cowboy played by Yul Brynner was the original terminator, and we get to see from his infrared pixilated viewpoint, and also to not see things (like a human body) when the body's heat signature is obscured by the heat of a torch. In *The Terminator* we see the world from the android viewpoint, with its graphical calculations of motion of target objects, or the *Terminator III* 'tasting' a blood sample and having a DNA report pop up on her internal screen. In *Predator* we see glimpses of the world through the alien's (again infrared) eyes, and hear sounds through its unique aural input. In a germophobia-inducing scene in *Outbreak*, we travel through the air along with floating virus cells emanating from a cough (in a movie theater, infecting moviegoers).

All of these impossible perspectives that film allows us raise the question: Is reality a perspective-based thing, or is reality a myriad of perspectives that film shows us. Is it showing us more of reality than anyone could normally see, or is it giving us an impossible view that transcends reality?

The key to all of these examples is that the filmmakers designed them to show us how it would be to be in those situations or perspectives. They didn't simply stipulate a scenario, but rather constructed what they believed those perspectives might look like, or what they imagine those perspectives might look like. The audience knows something of what it might be like, and so the filmmakers seek to replicate either reality or what the audience expects reality would be

like. Of course, for some of these events and places, since they are impossible perspectives, we cannot know exactly what being in them would be like. But we can use our best information to estimate what it might be like. But this is not unexpected – we are in this situation in all areas of life to some extent. Even in rigorous science we need to make such approximations as to what an actual observer might see. So that need not detract from the claim that this is reality being displayed. Films take us to corners and aspects of reality we cannot go to in normal life.

But is it really merely a construction? There are limitations to our knowing how close these depictions are to reality. But they are based on reality. In *The Core*, a vehicle is built to tunnel down beneath the earth's surface to its core. If the filmmakers were just guessing and/or stipulating or creating things out of thin air (thin earth?) with no scientific basis, we could just as well have the coring vehicle depicted as plowing through whipped cream and jelly beans. But the filmmakers limit themselves to what we know of the actual internal conditions of the earth – it is rocky near the surface, and molten rock beneath, and they have their craft able to tunnel through those conditions, and depict the inner Earth as solid then molten rock. They may not get every scientific detail exactly right, but they feel obliged to adhere to general scientific facts about the impossible perspective they seek to put us in. This is what makes the film believable (at least to a large degree).

So are these impossible perspectives a new kind of reality, constructed by filmmakers? A hyper-realistic view of things? I would say not – for the same reason that looking through a telescope or microscope is not a construction of hyper-realistic view of reality. Human beings use tools to expand their ways of seeing the world. What we see in a microscope or telescope (even with radio or infrared or x-ray images) isn't a construction or hyper-anything – it is just reality. A greater, deeper, more detailed (and yet still only partial) view of reality. In the same way, filmmakers using the impossible perspectives discussed here are doing the same – expanding our

view of the world, not for science, but for art, and perhaps also for philosophy. Being able to experience these altered views of reality can lead us to understand the world in different ways.

However, before declaring all of these cinematic impossible perspectives real, or hyper-real, we should remember that in some cases, they either intentionally or unintentionally deviate from what our best scientific information tells us – one famous case is the opening of the original TV show *Star Trek*. As we know, in the vacuum of space, there is no air to propagate sounds, and this was taken into account in the first version of the now-famous opening credits. But when they showed the USS Enterprise silently speeding by the camera, the scene, while scientifically right, seemed wrong – it looked too static and was not dramatically effective. So the makers of *Star Trek* added the swoosh sound as the ship speeds by the camera, not because that is what the perspective would actually be like, but because that is what they thought viewers of the opening credits scene would want or need dramatically. The screaming passes of spaceships and their clearly aerodynamic maneuvers in the *Star Wars* films (and many other science fiction films) are less self-consciously inaccurate – they are filmed with engine noises to make the scenes both exciting and also to some degree familiar.

Some other filmmakers are either ignorant of how, scientifically speaking, they should have designed these kinds of scenes, or knew it but were either too lazy to bother or couldn't afford to film it as reality dictates. In deep space there is no gravity (or, in orbit, no effective gravity due to constant free-fall) to keep astronauts on the floor of a spacecraft. But it is very difficult and costly to film actors in zero-g or to simulate zero-g, so many science fiction films (including *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* franchises) come up with a fictional device of artificial gravity so that the actors can walk on the floors of their ships, and so we can more easily identify with them and their situations (and the filmmakers can save vast amounts of money by filming using 'gravity'). Many fewer films actually bother to accurately depict people floating in the zero-g of space, among them *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Apollo 13*, *Deep Impact*, and *Gravity*. A few films also



depict the actual artificial gravity that a rotating spaceship would provide, such as *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Elysium*. But the majority of films just avoid the trouble of being scientifically accurate either by simply ignoring the science or by invoking a convenient fictional device. So any grand metaphysical or epistemological pronouncements about film in general need to be somewhat tempered by these kinds of pragmatic limitations of budget. Sometimes lofty ambitions must yield to financial limitations. But often what films indeed do is achieve a new kind of viewpoint – the impossible perspective.

One more comment in closing: I would go so far as to say that this use of impossible perspectives is a characteristic part of the film genre, one that lends itself to film more than other media, just as certain methods of depiction or description lend themselves better to other genres than film. In novels and short stories, we often read what a character is thinking. In fact, I would say that this is perhaps a central feature of fiction writing as communication and artistic tool. There are films that also use voiceovers to let us hear the character's thought, but they are usually clunky and ineffective. Of course, there are a few cases when voiceovers in film are an integral part of the film and done well, but these are the minority. In films, resorting to voiceover often seems a poor substitute for better scriptwriting or better acting. We should see the thoughts on the actor's face and in the dialogue, and not have to hear them in an artificial voiceover. In fact, meddling studios have sometimes insisted in adding voiceovers later, when the director did not intend to have them. In *Dune* and in *Blade Runner* this was done against the directors' original desires, and *Dune* (1984) director David Lynch even demanded that his name be stricken from the film because of the studio's editorial meddling. In some of these cases, the studios' worry is that the audience will not be able to follow the plot without voiceover explanations. One would think that proper storytelling and acting would make the voiceover unnecessary, and the studios are simply not giving intelligent audiences enough credit. However, even though it is sometimes true that opaque storytelling can obscure the plot, voiceovers are usually a clumsy remedy.

Just as voiceovers usually seem forced and awkward in film, impossible viewpoints seem natural in film and often forced in written fiction. It can take many paragraphs of a story or book to describe the way such an impossible perspective looks, whereas in film (when it is done well) it happens immediately. Some writers do skillfully manage such descriptions, but even when written well, it still works better on film. Here is one way that the movie is better than the book. Perspectives, both possible and impossible, are meant to be seen, and lived in, rather than merely read. And here is one way that film carves out an essential and unique effect.

## CAN A FILM BE A RITUAL? ON THE POSSIBILITY OF REATUALISTIC CINEMA

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Filmmakers compel rituals through the moving image. If film can represent, provoke, advance, be structured like and even invent or produce rituals, the question arises whether it might also be possible for a film to *be* a ritual. Can a ritual exist by means of moving image? Can one undergo a ritual through moving pictures? I will try to show that there are cases of movie-made rituals. And if there exists some movie-made ritual, then *ipso facto* movie-made ritual is feasible. To clarify cinema as a possible vehicle for a ritual to happen, I will firstly present the concept of *REATUAL* by the Cameroonian filmmaker Jean-Pierre Bekolo. Secondly, I will investigate briefly his film as a case in point of “cinema as *reatual*”. Thirdly, we will try to understand the “reatualistic” potentiality of cinema by means of an investigation into the nature of the ritual and thereby move away from cinema studies’ representational paradigm and see how the virtual (Deleuze) in reatualistic cinema confronts and intervenes in the real.

If a corpse is missing it can only be buried virtually and symbolically. Can a cinematic burial lay to rest the haunting specters in the same purifying way as a burial can? *La mort d'un prophète* by Raoul Peck<sup>1</sup> tries to do this. Can cinema deal with the skeletal remains and ruins of shattered national dreams? John Akomfrah's *Testament*<sup>2</sup> can convincingly be seen that way. Can viewers participate in an urban rite of purification? Barbara McCullough inspires to do so in her experimental work *Water Ritual #1*, which is part of *Shopping Bag, Spirits and Freeway Fetishes: Reflections on Ritual Space*.<sup>3</sup> In her book *The Skin of the Film*<sup>4</sup>, Laura Marks describes how intercultural cinema that searches for memory-images turns out to be a process of collective mourning: a ritual.

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<sup>1</sup> *Lumumba, La Mort D'un Prophète*. Dir. Raoul Peck, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> *Testament*. Dir. John Akomfrah. Black Audio Film Collective, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> *Shopping Bag, Spirits and Freeway Fetishes: Reflections on Ritual Space*. Dir. Barbara McCullough, 1981.

<sup>4</sup> Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

These four examples point to an underexposed use of cinema which is ritualistic. Are movie-made rituals possible at all? How can cinema possibly be a ritual in itself? Similarities between cinema and the ritual were already recognized in early film theory, particularly at the level of film reception, *i.e.* not the ritual in the moving image, but the ritual *of* the moving image. Canudo<sup>5</sup> considered cinema as a modern mass ritual or as a collective ritual. A few decades later, in the era of digital cinema and the profound change it had in how people engaged in a ritualistic communal behavior when going to the celluloid flick, Rachel Moore points to a clear analogy between cinema and ritual. In *Savage Theory, Cinema as Modern Magic* (2000), she states that “despite all its mass characteristics, we do not, apart from entering the theater, feel ourselves to be members of a mass at all. The anonymity of the cinema and its solitude in darkness creates a kind of public intimacy, which may be more clearly apparent if understood in ritual terms. Ritual cures work in the same kind of public intimate way. Like cinema, the mode of address from the healer is to everyone and to no one. The audience in a magical ritual is made up of discrete people with varying concerns”.<sup>6</sup> Cinema, according to her, is like a ritual cure for the misfortunes of modernity and film functions as a modern magical fetish.

What about the ritual *in* the moving image? Rachel Moore points at further similarities: Similar to the ritual, she argues, “film can rework the irrecoverable past into new constellations of meaning with a new temporality, [...] and in so doing, it can bring time itself to life”.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, she recognizes cinema in Marcel Mauss description of rituals which are, according to him, “eminently effective; they are creative; they *do* things”.<sup>8</sup> And indeed, cinema’s link between reality and fiction, negotiating between past, present and future, mirrors the relation

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<sup>5</sup> Ricciotto Canudo, “The Birth of the Sixth Art,” *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology, 1907-1939*, ed. Richard Abel (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988) 58-66.

<sup>6</sup> Rachel O. Moore, *Savage Theory: Cinema as Modern Magic* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid* 142.

<sup>8</sup> Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic* (The Norton Library. New York: Norton, 1975) 19.

that a ritual holds to reality and fiction as well as to past and future. Both are real fictions negotiating, transforming and even suspending tangible and intangible realities such as time.

We can perceive three modalities of the ritual present in cinema. Firstly, a great number of films *represent* rituals. Here it suffices to refer to ethnographic filmmaking. In this modality, films make rituals accessible, illustrate and interpret them, or theorize them.<sup>9</sup> Here, the ritual is not original to the film but exists prior to the film. Secondly, filmmaking *provokes* rituals as a catalyst and thereupon *participates* in it. Jean Rouch's *Ciné-trance* might serve as the most known example. In this modality, even though the ritual exists prior to the film, it originates from the production of the film in its novel manifestation. Thirdly, films *invent* rituals, such as *Mossane* by the Senegalese filmmaker Safi Faye<sup>10</sup>, one of Rouch's students;<sup>11</sup> or *Nostalgia*<sup>12</sup> by the American avant-garde filmmaker Hollis Frampton who shares his personal the ritualistic destruction of his past as a photographer by burning his pictures. In this last modality, the ritual does not exist prior to the film and is original to the film. This *cinematic invention* of rituals radicalizes what Deleuze calls the "legend-making capacity". Deleuze already attributed this capacity to the characters in the participatory cinema of Rouch. The filmmaker does not film the identity of a character but the becoming of real characters when they themselves start to make fiction, when they enter into "the flagrant offence of making up legends" and so to contribute to the invention of their people.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Matthias De Groof, "Rouch's Reflexive Turn, Indigenous Film as the Outcome of Reflexivity in Ethnographic Film," *Visual Anthropology* 26 (2013): 1–23.

<sup>10</sup> *Mossane*. Dir. Safi Faye. Cinématographie, Muss, 1990.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Matthias De Groof, *Safi Faye, Rouch's Eurydice. African Cinema and Ethnographic Film*, forthcoming.

<sup>12</sup> *Nostalgia*. Dir. Hollis Frampton, 1971.

<sup>13</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (London: The Athlone Press, 2000) 150–151.

Despite these analogies, however, a very clear distinction between a film and ritual remains. In the example above, the spectators of Jean Rouch's seminal film *Les maîtres fous*,<sup>14</sup> in which a ritual is performed to exorcise colonial evil, remain just that: spectators, not participants. Moreover, although the Hauka-ritual we watch on screen might be very subversive and a form of cultural resistance, the film itself does not exorcise colonial evil.<sup>15</sup> In these cases of representing, provoking or inventing, the spectator does not participate in a ritual on film. In none of these cases, film becomes a ritual in itself. Are there nevertheless points of more intense convergence?

As observed, creators of moving pictures possess the resources to make original ritual contributions. They compel rituals through the moving image. If film can be so similar to a ritual, if it can represent, provoke, advance and even invent or produce rituals, the question – which I take from Noël Carroll's concern with the link between cinema and philosophy<sup>16</sup> – arises naturally whether it might also be possible for a film to *be* a ritual. Can a ritual exist by means of moving image? Can one undergo a ritual through moving pictures? Can moving images mediate a ritual in such a way that the film has the effects of a ritual, or – stronger - become a ritual?

I will try to show that there are some cases of movie-made rituals. And if there exists some movie-made ritual, then *ipso facto* movie-made ritual is possible, feasible. To clarify cinema as a possible vehicle for a ritual to happen, I will firstly present the concept of *REATUAL* by the Cameroonian filmmaker Jean-Pierre Bekolo. Secondly, I will investigate briefly the film *The*

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<sup>14</sup> *Les Maîtres Fous*. Dir. Jean Rouch. Films de la Pléiade, 1954.

<sup>15</sup> In this regard, Martin Roberts writes that “the film, [...] by reframing [the ritual] as an object of Western ethnographic knowledge, symbolically reasserts authority over it” (1996: 83).

<sup>16</sup> Noël Carroll, Movie-made Philosophy: On the Possibility of doing Philosophy by means of the Moving Image, at the conference on *Philosophy and Film: Thinking reality and time through film*, from 6-10 May 2014 at the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, Goethe-Institut Portugal, Standort Lissabon and the Cinemateca Portuguesa

*Bloodettes / Les Saignantes*<sup>17</sup> as a case in point of “cinema as *reatual*”. What makes *The Bloodettes* central in the discussion is because the ritual it vehicles pre-existed the film but, paradoxically, originates from it. Thirdly, we will try to understand the “reatualistic” potentiality of cinema by means of an investigation into the nature of the ritual.

## 1.

Around 1998, Bekolo comes up with a neologism: *reatual*, which is a combination of “Real” and “Virtual” sounding like “Ritual”. The neologism to Bekolo puts virtuality at the service of reality for the recreation of one world<sup>18</sup>. By producing narratives, the virtual (and the imagination that goes along with it) influences, shapes or threatens the real and by doing so, reinforces itself. *Reatural* is the need to combine the real and the virtual in one realm. This idea of cinema uses fiction to push the boundaries of the real.

Bekolo presented his concept to Andrée Davanture who is the founder of ATRIA, the organization that has produced hundreds of African films since 1981. Together, Bekolo and Andrée created a new African Cinema Production Center in Paris, called GlobReatural in 2000 as an extension of Atria. For Jean-Pierre Bekolo, GlobReatural is there to make the cinema of tomorrow. In 2004, *GlobReatural* is described as an organization for the “Homo Faber knocking on the door of Utopia. A new human being in a new world”.<sup>19</sup>

## 2.

As a matter of fact, Bekolo’s film *The Bloodettes* is a case in point of the concept “*reatual*”. By retrieving and adapting an existing ritual (Mevungu) – actually, the fact that it preexists the film is only secondary here – and by his choice to *structure* his film like a night-long ritual, *Les*

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<sup>17</sup> *Les Saignantes*. Dir. Jean-Pierre Bekolo Obama. JBA Productions, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Monteiro Rodrigues, “Murmures,” *Africultures* Mars 26 (2000): 122. <http://globreatual.blogspot.be/>

<sup>19</sup> Jean-Pierre Bekolo Obama, “Organization: Globreatual,” *Globreatual* (2004 December) 29.

*Saignantes*, I would argue, *becomes* a ritual and not in the least because of its intended cleansing, healing and purificatory effects. The film is not a medium of anthropological inquiry nor does it disseminate anthropological knowledge. The pre-colonial ritual of the Mevungu, which has been often the subject of anthropological research, remains invisible and is deliberately not represented, but is “at work” and “carried-out” in *Les Saignantes*. Cinema becomes its new medium.

The two protagonists of the film are confronted with a loss of autonomy, a situation of a Mbembian deathscape and a collective inurement to their country’s regression. But then, they are guided by the Mevungu, a ritual which has to be done when “everything goes wrong” in society. Through well-defined stages, they undergo the ritual and adopt a new mental imagery. Empowered by the Mevungu, the two girls in the film defy a phallocentric regime of necropolitics.

Rituals which ought to protect society by dealing with extreme heteronomy need cinema to re-invade the real according to Bekolo. A ritual proscribes a set of actions to follow in exceptional moments when one does not know anymore how to act. The ritual then, allows to be indulged in it. In *Les Saignantes*, the set of actions is proscribed to individuals but the new social reality it creates is the re-invention of a people, to paraphrase Deleuze once more. The wish for a collective enunciation is uttered again but not without reminding us that “the people” were missing at first and not without the utterance of a shared myth by the endeavors of two individuals.

### 3.

What should the relation between the virtual and the real in a film be so that a film can be experienced as a *reatual* (or more generally, cinema as possibly *reatualistic*)? In cinema as *reatual* the link between the virtual and the real is not a question of *mimesis* – the reproduction of reality – but a disclosure of reality. It is not showing but evoking, putting forward and bringing



to life the real as well as revealing its structures and contradictions that remain unresolved. It is not representing but negotiating the world.

This recalls us Clifford Geertz understanding of the rite as shaping social order, as not only a model *of* reality but also *for* reality<sup>20</sup> (1973). But it recalls us even more Wittgenstein's understanding of the ritual in *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough* (1993 [1931]) in which Wittgenstein denies that a ritual is about prescientific representing or understanding the world aiming at efficacy. Instead he argues that it rather expresses an attitude towards reality (the world, life, death, ...), an intentionality or a wish. A ritual is taken to accomplish something, without therefore believing that it intends any purposiveness like Frazer did. As a performative act it seeks to affect change, not only in a functional-social way but in an ontological way. This "symbolic causality" is at stake in *reatualistic* cinema too.

For instances, the masquerade performed in *The Bloodettes* emasculates a phallogentric gaze. Also, its dystopian depiction of a future in this film and a direct visual and auditory address to the spectator, purifies him/her from an attitude of inurement.

In other words, the "symbolic causality" (Claude Lévi-Strauss)<sup>21</sup> affects the spectator who is not only an agent because of his capacity of interpretation but whose agency is also an effect of the (film)text which constitutes him or her *as* an agent.

This shift in focus from *meaning* to *effect* corresponds with recent film theory, which no longer questions what a text *signifies* but what it *does* – even if this remains indeterminate and undecidable. What we can say, however, is that in *reatualistic* cinema, it reinvents time as becoming.

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<sup>20</sup> Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 93.

<sup>21</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, "L'efficacité Symbolique," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 135.1 (1949): 5-27.

The relation between the virtual and the real in *reatualistic* cinema changes the Aristotelian understanding of art as *an imitation of a graspable reality by seizing its form* to art as *creating reality by seizing its form*. Whereas form in the first definition is the equivalent of “essence”, it refers to “narration” in the second. Art becomes the creation of a graspable reality by seizing its form, its story... Put differently, art forms reality by reinventing its story. Whereas the Aristotelian form is a formula imposing its own conception of reality on us, the *reatual* transforms it to invent its own durability.<sup>22</sup> The extraordinary power of cinema is not to be found in its power to imitate reality but in its capacity to give material shapes to dreams previously buried in inaccessible places; its capacity to lift the barrier between the real and the imaginary.

This “increasing of the world” is what Bekolo calls “applied cinema”,<sup>23</sup> a cinema beyond film, engaged with life and the effort to make Aristotle’s *Poetics* and *Politics* into one single book. Of course, this refusal of a separation between art and life does not make the boundaries between film and reality vanish in a totalitarian way. It does, however, reconsider separations taken for granted and instead considers the real as a construction of the virtual, since reality is in any case always constructed within the means of representation. The ritual enables us to articulate the real and have an (utopic) impact on it. “Virtual”, in this sense, is not opposed to “real”, but to “actual” (Deleuze). Cinema can suggest the possible and in this way evoke the real.

In Bekolo’s conception of cinema as *reatual*, we might still perceive some remains or even presuppositions of causality (and thus distinction) between the virtual and the real, even though at some point the barrier between both is lifted and literally combined in one single signifier. When saying that the *reatual* puts virtuality at the service of the real, both the virtual and the

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Senegalese filmmaker Djibril Diop Mambety in: Jean-Pierre Bekolo Obama, “La Grammaire De Grand-Mère,” 8’. Senegal/Cameroon, 1996.

<sup>23</sup> Jean-Pierre Bekolo Obama, “Welcome to Applied Fiction,” *Framework: The Journal of Cinema & Media* 49.2.Fall (2008): 106–13.

real are still discernable despite the fact that the conception and articulation of the real is precisely dependent on the virtual.

What makes a film *reatualistic*, however, cannot be seen in terms of a reality outside the ritual to which it would give a perspective or to which it would correspond – let alone that it can be seen it in terms of accessing, reflecting or distorting the real, or, on the contrary, denying, masking or diverting from it – since the “real” is not the given but it is a projection, constructed within the *reatual* as a signifying system and not a truth claim. The real is a function (a purpose) of the ritual. Rituals – as a particular way of articulation the real / as a virtual aspect of reality – can (sometimes) use cinema to do so.

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## ESSAY AS FILM: JULIO BRESSANE'S *BRÁS CUBAS*

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In this paper, I aim to show why the movie *Brás Cubas* (1985), by Julio Bressane, can be interpreted as one of the best philosophical essays on the greatest Brazilian novel of the XIXth century: *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* (1881), by Machado de Assis. To accomplish this proposal, at first I will examine the very notion of “essay” as presented by Theodor Adorno in his famous “Essay as form”. After that, I will argue that the notion of a “luciferine transcripation”, developed by the Brazilian poet and translator Haroldo de Campos, is the clue to understand not only Bressane’s movie, but also to establish how a film such as *Brás Cubas* can be legitimately read as a philosophical essay. Finally, I will briefly analyze some aspects of the film *Brás Cubas* to show why Bressane made a huge contribution to the understanding of the subversive modernity of Machado de Assis.

*The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*, published by Machado de Assis in 1881, is traditionally considered the most important Brazilian novel of the XIXth century, if not of the whole history of Brazilian literature. Machado de Assis is undoubtedly our classic of the classics, the Brazilian Goethe, mandatory reading in all schools and a fundamental influence for almost all Brazilian writers that followed him. If the list of titles about our greatest classic is still shorter than the list of names in Warsaw’s phone catalogue, as Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* according to Jan Kott’s ironic remark<sup>1</sup>, it is only a matter of time. Facing this huge cultural monument, about which so much ink has been spilled, the first question that every interpreter must ask himself is the following: why write another book on Machado de Assis? Won’t the one who tries it be destined to reinvent the wheel?

This was, at least, the question I asked myself during the years of research for my PhD, dedicated to a phenomenological interpretation of the *Posthumous Memoirs*, during which I read dozens of books about it. I won’t talk here about the reasons that I finally have found to justify

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Kott, *Shakespeare nosso contemporâneo* (São Paulo: Cosac & Naify, 2003) 69. (All translations of the works cited are my own responsibility.)

the existence of my own book about Machado, whose title is *The second life of Brás Cubas: The philosophy of art of Machado de Assis*. Instead, I would like to talk about the astonishment that seized me when I perceived that the best essay ever “written” about Machado de Assis wasn’t the work of a traditional literary critic, but the work of Julio Bressane, a film maker. And his essay wasn’t a critical text, but a work of fiction, a film called *Brás Cubas*.

From this astonishment sprang the two main questions of this essay:

- 1) why is it legitimate to claim that the film *Brás Cubas*, by Bressane, is a critical essay about the *Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*, by Machado? In which sense can a work of fiction be considered an essay?
- 2) why Bressane’s *Brás Cubas*, his essay as film, is the best essay that I know about Brazil’s greatest classic?

### **1 . Towards the concept of “essay as film”**

Since the publishing of Montaigne’s *Essais*, in 1595, the concept of essay has received countless philosophical definitions. As the title of this presentation indicates, however, the *Leitfaden* for the definition of essay that will guide my analysis of Bressane’s film has its roots in the philosophical tradition that made possible Adorno’s “Essay as form”. This tradition has its main sources in the writings of the *Frühromantiker*, especially Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, of the young Lukács, of Max Bense and of course of Walter Benjamin, “the undeniable master in the art of the essay”, all explicitly quoted by Adorno in his text.

The fundamental assumption of Schlegel and Novalis, at least according to Benjamin’s doctorate thesis, is “the intuition of the real as a thinking organism”<sup>2</sup>. The romantic’s

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften Band I-1* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991) 66.



fundamental “metaphysical belief”<sup>3</sup> is that all things, but specially the works of art, think themselves, contain a self-reflexivity which is inherent to them. “Happily”, wrote Schlegel, “the *Wilhelm Meister* is one of these books that judge themselves”<sup>4</sup>. And, in harmony with his friend, Novalis remarked: “A critical review is a supplement. The real works of art don’t need critical reviews, because they already contain their own reviews about themselves”<sup>5</sup>.

Based upon this assumption, the task of the critique is neither to judge the works of art according to the pseudo-universal laws pre-established by the classicists, nor to merely spit subjective and arbitrary opinions about the works. Beyond the extremes of the classicist dogmatism and the impressionistic estheticism, the task of the critic is only to promote the intensification of the reflexivity already present in the work itself. This intensification, potentially infinite – “to romanticize”, says Novalis, “is to give the finite an infinite appearance”<sup>6</sup> – converts the true reader in an extension of the author. This romantic concept of critique, thought as co-authorship, as a method to potentiate the works and not to judge them, implies the “discovery of the hidden plans of the work itself, the execution of its veiled intentions, the potentiation of the reflexivity already present in the single work”<sup>7</sup>. Assuming the total positivity of the critique and the un-criticability of what is bad, the romantics ended by establishing that a true critique can only be a poetic critique. “Poetry can only be criticized by poetry. A judgment about art which is not at the same time a work of art has no citizenship in the realm of art. This

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<sup>3</sup> Benjamin, *GS* 62.

<sup>4</sup> Schlegel *apud* Benjamin, *GS* 68.

<sup>5</sup> Novalis *apud* Benjamin, *GS* 66.

<sup>6</sup> Novalis *apud* Benjamin, *GS* 67.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin, *GS* 65.

poetic critique will expose again the exposition, will form again an already formed work, will instil a new breath in it, reconfiguring the work.”<sup>8</sup>

Considering that “the essay”, as Max Bense puts it, “is the form of the critical category of our spirit”<sup>9</sup>, it can be deduced, coherently with the romantics teaching, that the essay has the same aesthetic autonomy of the works it criticizes. This perception led the young Lukács to write (in his famous letter to Leo Popper) that “the essay is an art form”<sup>10</sup>. Arguing for this point of view, Lukács claims that, as the works of art themselves, the great essays never become obsolete. “Two essays can never contradict one another: each creates a different world”<sup>11</sup>. The same intuition led Walter Benjamin, in the introduction of his *Trauerspielbuch*, to state that “the most profound question of the *Symposion* [and maybe of essayism in general] investigates if truth will ever be able to do justice to beauty”<sup>12</sup>.

With regard to this tradition, it would only be natural to claim that a cinematographic work of art such as the film *Brás Cubas*, by Bressane, should be considered as an essay. After all, being a cinematographic adaptation of the novel that potentializes the self-reflexivity already contained in Machado’s literature, this film also meets the other basic requirement of the essay form. “The essay”, argues Lukács, “always speaks of something that has already been given form”<sup>13</sup>. Adorno radicalizes this point of view by stating that “the essay resists the idea of the master-work that reflects the idea of creation and totality. Its form follows the critical thought that man is no creator, that nothing human is creation. The essay, always directed towards

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<sup>8</sup> Schlegel *apud* Benjamin, *GS* 69.

<sup>9</sup> Max Bense, “O ensaio e sua prosa,” *Revista serrote* 16 Rio de Janeiro: IMS (2014): 178.

<sup>10</sup> Georg Lukács, *Die Seele und die Formen* (Berlin: Egon Fleischel & Co., 1911) 4.

<sup>11</sup> Lukács, *Seele* 25.

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin, *GS* 211.

<sup>13</sup> Lukács, *Seele* 23.

artifacts, does not present itself as a creation; nor does it long for something all-embracing, the totality of which would resemble creation".<sup>14</sup>

Answering my first question simply claiming that a film of fiction can meet all the requirements to be considered an essay as long as it is based upon a pre-existing work of art poses a problem of fact and a problem of principle. The problem of fact is the undiscussed assumption, shared by all the authors mentioned before, that the essay is an exclusively literary form, a form of prose. The problem of principle, on the other hand, was raised almost exclusively by Adorno, who opens his reflections polemicizing against the lukácsian definition of the essay as an art form. I quote Adorno: "The essay thereby acquires an aesthetic autonomy that is easily criticized as simply borrowed from art, though it distinguishes itself from art through its conceptual character and its claim to truth free from aesthetic semblance"<sup>15</sup>.

Despite the lack of time, I would like to briefly address these two problems concerning my central hypothesis that the film *Brás Cubas*, by Bressane, is a true case of the essay as form.

As regards the problem of fact, it seems to me that the exclusion of cinema as a genuine medium for the essay form is less due to Lukács's or even Adorno's definition of essay than to an historical contingency. After all, if the task of the essay is to reconfigure the work it criticizes, bringing its immanent reflexivity to a higher level<sup>16</sup>, or to "think in fragments, considering that reality itself is fragmentary"<sup>17</sup>, then "the mechanics of editing forms the technological apparatus of this art of the experiment"<sup>18</sup>. Now, in cinema the mechanics of editing have a much more conspicuous position than in literature or any other kind of writing in prose. Regarding this

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<sup>14</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Noten zur Literatur* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981) 26.

<sup>15</sup> Adorno, *Noten* 11.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin, *GS* 67.

<sup>17</sup> Adorno, *Noten* 25.

<sup>18</sup> Bense, *Ensaio* 175.

fundamental principle of the essay form – the need to edit and reconfigure a pre-given material –, my hypothesis is that film is ontologically the most proper medium for the essay as form.

With regard to the problem of principle raised by Adorno, I think that his objection against the essay as an art form, if translated to the terms of our discussion today, mainly applies to the movies of the so called cultural industry, rather than to the work of an experimental director as Bressane. After all, in his cinema, the very process of making the film is ostensibly exposed, and this tends to destroy the “aesthetic semblance” of his work as a “well made” product, as a commodity. Therefore, in Bressane’s cinema, it is possible to argue that truth can appear free from aesthetic semblance, if we understand the “aesthetic semblance” as the result of an artist’s effort to hide the fragmentariness of his work or to submit all the fragments he edits to a pseudo harmonic totality. Finally, as regards the adornian requirement that “concepts should be the specific tools of the essay”<sup>19</sup>, I can only point out that Bressane’s cinema is eminently conceptual. In a brief text written by the director himself about his vision of Machado’s novel, we read:

There is an extraordinary premonition in the novel *Brás Cubas*: the cinema and its soul, editing. This book full of chapters of different sizes forces its prose to the limits of literature, in which it transubstantiates itself in the cinematographic gesture of editing: there are in this book jump cuts inside the narrative, but also long takes. Some chapters are fades, ellipses are veils, the reader becomes a lens (curiosity: there are the reader-wide-angle lens and the reader-telephoto lens). Some titles of chapters are still photograms. A question mark: a close-up. A gravestone (painting: ready-made): a chapter. The chapter “Inconvenience of this book” is a travelling with a handheld camera. Antonio Vieira says: let’s imagine an extraordinary vision that frees our senses from their proper sphere and inaugurates a seeing with the ears and a listening with the eyes. Tradition (translation) and Contradi(c)tion: to circulate from poetry to music, from painting to

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<sup>19</sup> Adorno, *Noten* 11.

literature, from cinema to everything, flowing, breaking all barriers, mixing all the relations between the knowledges. This is everything, this is the whole movement of contradictions. In the forest of his multiple senses, this book, witty and innovative, has as one of its perfumes a experimental character, because it is situated in a borderline. It's a book placed at the boundaries of books, music, painting and... film!<sup>20</sup>

With his cinematic vision of the novel *Posthumous memoirs of Brás Cubas*, the film-essayist Julio Bressane forged a new concept of Machado's literature as proto-cinema and showed us that cinema, even more than novel, can be defined as "the supreme symbolic form", a form that contains all others, including of course the form of the critical category of our spirit, the essay.

## **2. Bressane as the greatest Brazilian essayist on Machado de Assis**

Max Bense wrote: "The essayist is a combiner relentlessly creating new configurations around a given object. Everything that is near the object can be included in the combination, thus creating a new configuration of things. To transform the configuration in which the object is given to us, that is the meaning of the essayist experiment; and the reason to be of the essay consists less in finding a definition which reveals the object and more in adding contexts and configurations in which it can be inserted [...]. All great essayists associated the genius of combination to an extraordinary power of imagination"<sup>21</sup>.

This definition of the essayist fits Bressane's *Brás Cubas* especially well, even more so than most of his other films which intend to be lucipherinian translations of literary works. By a "lucipherinian translation", Haroldo de Campos, a neoconcretist poet and literary critic whose work inspired Bressane, understands the (lucipherinian) character of every translation that

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<sup>20</sup> Julio Bressane, *Cinemancia* (Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 2000) 50.

<sup>21</sup> Bense, *Ensaio* 179.

gives up the naïve ideal of fidelity and embraces the need to desacralize the original text, overcoming the translator's melancholy in the name of a playful affirmation of the provisional and finite character of all human enterprise. This vision of the "task of the translator" ends up by blurring the traditional limits between critique, poetry and translation, between the "original" and the copy.

In the film *Brás Cubas*, Bressane's experimental editing combines the filmic translation of the beginning and of the end of the novel with two songs which were extremely popular in Brazil in the 1940's. In the first case, the combination highlights the irony of a "dead author" clashing all idols of humanity from the other world; in the second, it develops the highest vocation of the essay according to Adorno, which is to be heretic, rendering the classics unclassical, or even disqualifying them – questioning therefore the very idea of a cultural monument.

In the first sequence of *Brás Cubas* (1985), Bressane makes use of ideogramatic editing, à la Eisenstein, to reconstruct the part of the title of the novel he suppressed in the title of his film. Showing us his "necro-fone", and letting his sound technician place it in the eye of a skeleton, Bressane presents us visually the narrator of his film, a dead man who narrates his posthumous memoirs from the "other world" and who places himself above common mortals. Bressane makes it clear by a camera movement that turns the world upside down, as *Brás Cubas* intends to do with his memoirs. And, in order to highlight the cynicism of Brazilian upper classes, Bressane employs the dissonance between image and music to draw our attention to the utmost incredibility of the narrator, who is a very rich skeleton, but sings as if he was born in the slums, thus making clear that the book, although written in first person, was in fact "written against his pseudo-author"<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Schwarz, *Um mestre na periferia do capitalismo* (São Paulo: Duas Cidades; Ed. 34, 2000) 82.

The second fragment subverts the *Posthumous Memoirs*' famous grand finale, "I didn't have children; I didn't transmit the legacy of our misery to any creature"<sup>23</sup>, with the introduction of a song by Luiz Gonzaga in the background, thus making clear that beyond any absolute denial of existence, à la Schopenhauer, there lies a deeper meaning in the dead author's sentence. Having children is not the only way to transmit our legacy to future generations. We may also plant a tree or, worst case scenario, write a book – which is exactly what Brás Cubas just did, the same narrator who boast having done and having been nothing.

In both film fragments, we can sense not only the novel's formal irony, but also the highest vocation of the essay as form according to Adorno, the grand finale of his own text. Adorno writes: "Even the highest manifestations of the spirit, which express the happiness [of that single moment in which the whole existence is affirmed], even these ones are also guilty of creating obstacles for it, because they remain nonetheless only spirit. That is why the most profound law of the essay is heresy. Only by breaking the orthodoxy of thought can we make visible that which orthodoxy of thought secretly sought to make invisible"<sup>24</sup>. Against a systematic denial of existence and the melancholy caused by the loss of experience in a traditional sense, Bressane emphasizes the positive aspect of Brás Cubas's "saudade" as an essential tool to edit a new possibility of narration. As Luiz Gonzaga puts it, "Saudade, meu remédio é cantar...".

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<sup>23</sup> Machado de Assis, Joaquim Maria, *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Aguilar, 1994) CLX.

<sup>24</sup> Adorno, *Noten* 33.

## FILM-EDITING TECHNIQUES AND SPIRITUAL VIEWPOINTS OF REALITY

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In this paper I argue that film-editing techniques can impact considerably the philosophical content of a film. To illustrate this, I focus on what I call “spiritual films,” which I characterize as films that give the viewer a sense of presence of an ineffable spiritual dimension. Taking as an example several films by Andrei Tarkovsky, Bella Tarr, Robert Bresson, and Carl Dreyer, I suggest that four editing techniques play an important role in creating this spiritual dimension: solemn pace, meditative fascination, submission, and emotional distancing.

In this paper I would like to discuss the relationship between the editing of a film and the film’s philosophical viewpoint, in other words how film-editing techniques and styles impact what the film says about reality and life. However, instead of talking about films in general, I will focus here on a specific kind of films that are close to my heart—what I will refer to as *spiritual films*. These are films that portray the world as possessing a spiritual dimension, an indescribable “beyond” that transcends anything definable and describable.

How can we understand this spiritual dimension in spiritual films? What is it about such films that creates this special quality? The answer which I would like to suggest here is that certain film-editing techniques have an important role in creating this spiritual dimension, and I will attempt to describe how they work.

This line of thought might sound surprising to somebody who thinks that film-editing is only a secondary factor, and that the philosophical content of a film is determined primarily by the story-line and the dialogue. In contrast, I would like to give film-editing a much more central role in determining the film’s philosophical content.

### **The meaning of “spiritual”**



There are certain special films that give us the sense that we are in the presence of a greater dimension of being that deserves wonder and awe. Often we are at a loss of words to describe this quality. We cannot point to it as if it was a specific element in the storyline; we might say that it resides in the general atmosphere of the film.

I have in mind here not films that are *about* spirituality, not films that tell a story about holy men and angels and miracles, but rather films that are themselves a spiritual work of art, in the sense that they arouse our spiritual sensitivity and appreciation. Just like a spiritual poem or spiritual music, they fill our soul with a sense of wonderment, solemnity, inner silence.

Examples are some movies by Andrei Tarkovsky's such as *Andrei Rublov* (1966), films by Béla Tarr like *The Turin Horse* (2011), some of Carl Dreyer's films such as *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), and by Robert Bresson—for example *Pickpocket* (1959).

Such films can be regarded as spiritual films even if they portray the world as being meaningless and godless, like most of Béla Tarr's films. Whether they tell us about a Russian monk and painter (*Andrei Rublov*), or a poor father and daughter (*The Turin Horse*), or a petty pickpocket (*Pickpocket*), they act like a prayer or a sacred ritual in that they open for us a space that is beyond the mundane world. They invite us to witness this space, to step into it, to take part in it.

The notion of “spiritual” is not easy to define. For the present purpose it would be sufficient to point out several characteristics mentioned by three prominent thinkers, William James, Gabriel Marcel, and Paul Tillich in their works from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In his essay “Varieties of religious experience” the American psychologist and philosopher William James notes that the experience of the divine is characterized by a sense of presence of

an invisible reality that engulfs and soaks our world and gives it hidden meanings.<sup>1</sup> This powerful presence cannot be characterized by a perceptible quality. Just as a magnet influences iron pieces through its imperceptible magnetic field, the divine moves us without any visible mediator.

Gabriel Marcel, the French religious existentialist philosopher and playwright, uses the notion of “mystery” to refer to those aspects of existence which are accessible to us only through participation, not through description or perception.<sup>2</sup> Unlike a “problem” which is a still-unknown gap in our knowledge that can in principle be filled, a mystery refers to the reality in which one is immersed, and which can never be objectified or solved. Awareness of the mystery takes you away from an attitude of an uninvolved, objective observer or utilizer of objective facts, and makes you a participant in the mystery of life.

The German-born American philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich contends that the domain of the divine—or of what he calls “ultimate concern”—is accessible to us only through what he calls “symbols.”<sup>3</sup> A “symbol” points beyond itself, opening for us those hidden dimensions which are never available to us as objects. A ritual, for example, a sacred text, or a spiritual poem opens for us hidden dimensions that lie beyond the realm of describable, visible items.

We can now construct a preliminary sketch of the “spiritual” in terms of these three characteristics—a sense of a real but invisible presence, the realm in which one can only participate, and symbols that open for us a reality that lies beyond objectifiable items. Combining these three together we may say that a spiritual film takes us beyond its specifiable contents—beyond the events, things and people portrayed on the screen—and gives us a sense of an invisible presence of a powerful reality in which we can participate but which we cannot objectify and

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<sup>1</sup>. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experiences* (New York: Penguin, 1958) 61-63.

<sup>2</sup>. Gabriel Marcel, “The Ontological Mystery,” *The Philosophy of Existentialism* (New York: Citadel Press, 1995). See also Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Harvill Press, 1969), 242-270.

<sup>3</sup>. Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957) 41-43.

perceive. In this respect, a spiritual film functions like a sacred ritual that opens a sublime realm for to take part in, though not to perceive.

Note that spirituality in this sense has no necessary connection to religion, nor to any spiritual doctrine or sect, because it doesn't assume heavenly beings or fantastic energies. The notion of the spiritual, as characterized here, refers to a hidden dimension of reality, not to definite beings *within* reality such angels, gods, spirits, or energies.

One might say that watching spiritual films is analogous to participating in a prayer—not the prayer of naïve devotees who believe that they are talking to a deity sitting in the sky, but the prayer of a sophisticated person who knows that the words of the prayer are mere human images, and yet they can somehow open the human heart and mind to a higher reality.

Given this sense of the spiritual, our central question in this paper is: How does a film create this sense of presence of (and participation in) a silent dimension of reality?

It would be absurd to search for a simple formula to explain this. Just as there is no recipe for creating poetry or music, there is no recipe for creating spiritual presence in films. Nevertheless, although a simple formula is out of the question, we can definitely say interesting things about spiritual films, just as we can say interesting things about poems or symphonies. Obviously, several different factors probably contribute to the creation of spiritual qualities in complex ways, including the storyline, the dialogue, and the accompanying music. But I believe that one particular factor—the editing of the film—plays a prominent role here.

Let me suggest four main editing strategies that play this role.

### **1. Solemn pace (rhythm)**

Perhaps the most obvious way in which editing can add to the spiritual qualities of a film is by imparting on us, the viewers, an inner attitude of solemnity, gravity, seriousness. As

William James notes, not every attitude enables us to appreciate the spiritual dimension.<sup>4</sup> If your mood is light and comical, for example, or of cynical ridicule, you are most likely not in the presence of the spiritual. You need to undergo a change of attitude and be more solemn—not necessarily sad, because you may be full of joy, but your attitude needs to have some weight and significance, as when you enter a church.

One important way in which a film can give viewers a sense of solemnity is by forcing them to watch the scene on the screen at a slow pace. I don't mean that the events in the plot of the movie should happen slowly, but rather that the editing is slow, in other words that the viewer's perspective—which is the camera's perspective—changes slowly and gradually. After all, an event that is slow according to the plot doesn't necessarily give us a sense of slowness, because the shots that show this slow event may change quickly from one perspective to another. For example, a scene of a very long dinner can be edited in such a way that the camera quickly moves every second or two from one person to another. But alternatively, the camera may also stay immobile for a very long period of time, or glide very slowly around the table, and in this way make us feel as if we are looking in a slow, long and steady gaze—which may induce in us a solemn attitude. This is indeed the case with the films which I mentioned earlier.

## **2. Meditative fascination**

A slow paced camera perspective, when focusing on a prolonged and repeating movement, can create in the viewer a sense of enchantment or fascination. There is something in a repetitive movement—a movement which repeats itself over and over again in new variations, that captivates our mind. This is why we can sit on the beach and watch for hours the waves of the sea rolling and crashing and retreating, or sit by the fireside and watch with a dreamy gaze the flames flickering in endless shapes and forms.

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<sup>4</sup>. *Ibid* 47-48.

This is a mesmerizing experience which can take us out of our self-control mode into a kind of dreamlike, transpersonal, infinite space of fascination and wonder. And indeed, this experience is used in many religious traditions in ecstatic rituals, in sacred dances, chanting and incantation. It is a spiritual experience which takes us out of ordinary self.

In the cinema world, such repetition is completely foreign to mainstream Hollywood movies which do every trick in the book to grab viewers' attention with a constant barrage of exciting new stimuli, in order not to bore and lose the viewer. But strangely, when we watch the endless running of the horse at the beginning of Béla Tarr's *The Turin Horse*, or the long string of hand movements of the thieves in Bresson's film *Pickpocket*, we find that these repetitions are not boring at all. On the contrary, they captivate and mesmerize us, especially when they are accompanied by slow camera movements and long silences. And of course, both Bresson's and Tarr's films are notorious for their long silences.

### 3. Submission

Slow editing pace (slow camera movement and long takes) helps to impart on viewers a third important attitude—a sense of submission. Such a pace takes us out of our normal way of looking at things around us, and therefore out of our usual attitude to our environment. Normally, our eyes wonder around, jump from a person's face to his hands and back to the face, and from there to the background, and so on. With very slow editing pace, however, we as viewers are forced to look differently at the events that take place on the screen. We are pulled out of our normal attitude, and are forced to submit to a different rhythm, a different way of encountering the world.

Getting out of our usual self and submitting ourselves to a different world-order is of course an important characteristic of the spiritual attitude. By submitting ourselves to different rules of viewing, film viewers find themselves in a reality whose rhythm is no longer a human rhythm. The slow pace converts me, the viewer, into a state of submission.

I suggest that there are additional editing techniques that promote in the viewer an attitude of submission. For example, a camera that scans details that are not directly relevant to the main event also forces us to look differently at the world. Usually, our eyes jump automatically to the central event, but now we are forced to look at seemingly irrelevant details, and we are forced to submit ourselves to the alien movement of the camera.

Another interesting editing technique that produces in the viewer a sense of submission can be seen in Theodor Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. Mainstream editing requires that whenever the story changes location, for example from one room to another, the viewers are presented with a so-called establishing shot. This is usually a wide-angle shot that shows us where in space we are standing and how the characters are located in relation to each other. Only then can the camera zoom in on the characters and show them in medium shot or close-up. In Dreyer's film, in contrast, almost no establishing shot is given. We move into the interrogation room, for example, but we are not shown the general structure of that room, or how it is related to other spaces which we saw previously. The result is that we are lost in space.

This lostness is a form of submission. The viewer is forced to relinquish control and orientation. We are now in the hands of broader powers.

#### **4. Emotional distancing**

Mainstream films typically attempt to make us identify with the main character (or characters). The idea is to draw viewers into greater emotional involvement, so that their emotions would be intensified. They may want to make the viewer identify with the hero's fear, or to feel angry at an injustice done to the protagonist, or happy at her success. To do so, contemporary films often employ editing techniques such as close-ups which bring us closer to the character and his or her emotional expressions, or over-the-shoulder shots that allow us to view the world from the protagonist's perspective, or panning shots that show us what the protagonist is looking at, and so on.

In contrast, in spiritual films we find that such editing techniques are quite rare. Often we see the protagonists from a distance, through the wider perspective of a long shot. When we do see protagonists in close-up, their faces are often inexpressive and difficult to read, as they are, for example, in Bresson's films and in Tarr's films. It is as if the film-editor has been told to omit close-up shots with ordinary emotional expressions.

I suggest that this distancing from human emotions functions to distance us, the viewers, from ordinary human concerns. Of course, human motivations might still appear in the storyline, but I as a viewer am not absorbed into them, I am not led to identify with them. Rather, I look at them from afar, from a broader perspective. The viewer is no longer looking at the events on the screen from inside the human world, as one human being looks sympathetically at another human being, but rather from a broader reality, which extends beyond the human world.

What I am suggesting here is that there is a considerable tension between the psychological and the spiritual. The more a film focuses on the psychology of its protagonists, the less it tends to focus on the spiritual. These are two different lenses from which we can look at human life. Although there is some overlap between them, one lens looks inside the characters, at their subjective feelings, while the other looks at the broader horizons in which the person is located.

## **Conclusion**

All this suggests that certain editing strategies have an important function in helping to create a sense of spiritual presence, a presence of a greater reality, of broader horizons of existence. Needless to say, not all of them must appear together in every spiritual film; sometimes only one or two of them are used with considerable impact.

Interestingly, those editing strategies which I mentioned work primarily not on the events in the storyline, but on us the viewers. Their main impact is to modify the inner attitude of the

viewer, not to modify what is happening on the screen—the storyline, for example, or the dialogue. If we imagine two films that are identical except that one is with those editing strategies and the other without them, the main difference between them would not be in the events that are happening on the screen, not in the information conveyed, not in the dialogue, but in their impact on our attitude as viewers. By changing the viewer's inner attitude these strategies help give us a sense of presence.

By analogy, compare two people entering the same hall. In one case, the person is told that the hall is an opera house. In the other case the person is told that the hall is a holy temple, and is asked to enter it appropriately. Naturally, the two visitors would enter the same hall with very different attitudes, and they would experience it in different ways. Spiritual editing strategies can be seen as equivalent to the instructions that tell us how to enter the space of the film and how to relate to that space. They tell us that we are now in a holy temple, and in this way they direct us to take upon ourselves a spiritual inner attitude.

More generally, the case of spiritual qualities shows that a film expresses its viewpoint on reality not just through its storyline, but importantly through the way it makes us look at the story-line—not only through the *what* but also through the *how*. The “how” of the film, especially film-editing strategies, plays an essential role in determining what the film has to say about reality, and in this sense it is an essential part of the film's philosophical viewpoint.



## ARIRANG: FRAGMENTS OF FICTIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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In the film *Arirang*, Kim Ki-duk, portrays himself isolated in a house, surrounded by preaching demons. Kim uses images to show his internal suffering in a brutal way. But where does reality end and where does its construction begin? When is Kim authentic and when does he pretend? A director is a creator of stories and Kim -going through a personal crises when making the film- still trusts this idea of a cinema for which “it is not possible to treat the reality, to reproduce it”, if not making a film that is “as a film”.

His cinema is, to paraphrase Pasolini, realistic as much as dreamlike: it starts from reality, from realism in playing and recording actions and bodies, movements and gestures, but becomes gradually abstract and symbolic. The constructed image always has a matrix and a basis in physical reality, but it is contaminated by the surreal and fantastic, and it is connected to an absent or dreamed “Real”. In Kim’s films this “Real” is dominated by the dialectic of seeing and not seeing; his glance goes beyond the visible and explores (recreates) the invisible, becoming invisible in itself for a better and deeper watching. Kim’s cinema is an “I cinema”, subjective and autobiographical, without being less open to the whole of human experience; it’s also a place of dreamlike and fantastic re-narration. Anyway, for us, it has a vital, hidden origin. We can find it in the Emotion, so intense that it incorporates world and fantasy, concreteness and abstraction, the real and the imaginary.

*Arirang* is not only a summary of Kim Ki-duk’s work so far, but also of his whole life. The director went through a personal crisis: an incident on the set of *Dream*<sup>1</sup> and the betrayal of some of his co-workers - who abandoned him during the filming of the movie - led Kim to withdraw into a cold and bare country house, where he lived for two years in almost complete isolation. But Kim continued to be a director. He bought a small digital camera and filmed his everyday routine to rethink his life through his art. This was the birth of *Arirang*.

In this experimental work, which serves as a kind of self-portrait, Kim chooses to alternate shots of his everyday life with scenes that feature posters of his films, paintings, photos and images from the set. After several heart-breaking and tender monologues, Kim decides to assemble a gun and get revenge on all of his enemies.

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<sup>1</sup> While he was shooting a scene, one actress risked to die hanged and only for a rapid intervention of the director she could save herself.

Kim's film initially seems to be a documentary of his own depression; it is simple, mimetic, repetitive, and almost banal in its (hyper) realism. Nevertheless, little by little, the director discovers that he can't help but creating stories and he chooses to dramatize his own disease, playing all the characters of the drama himself.

His work becomes a reflection on the link between truth and imagination, the real and the imaginary. Kim begins to imply some doubts in a scene (we will return to this later) where he sees himself on a monitor and, judging himself, he raises a series of questions (to both himself and us): when is he sincere and when is he pretending? But there is more: Kim's contemplation also seems to be a reflection on the cinematographic medium and its relationship with the world. The implied questions, then, are more general: is it possible to deal with reality through a movie? What is real and what is fiction? Where does representation end and construction begin? That said, the images of *Arirang* have a great ontological value thanks especially to the autobiographic impulse of the movie.

Although the film is unique, it is unsurprising that Kim produced it: he has always used his own life as art, which is evident in his debut works and in the descriptions of the buskers of *Crocodile* and *Wild Animals*. Kim has often fictionalized his life and filled it with many *ad hoc* details in order to make it more interesting or typical. He is a director without technical training who claims to have seen only three films before beginning to work (*The silence of the lambs*, *Les Amants du Pont Neuf* and *L'amant*). Similarly, his approach to the Seventh Art necessarily passes through the lived real; it is an outer, tested real, but also an inner one (representing his emotions) and, finally, a dreamt or imagined real. It is difficult to understand where the imagined Kim begins and the real one ends: the concreteness of his work often evolves into abstraction, as if the real and imagined worlds were continuously in mutual communication, as if one could not survive without the other.

The link between truth and abstraction enables us to analyse how the polysemic concept of ontology can be applied to cinema in its many possible forms. At least two fundamental

problems then arise: the first answers the question that has been set by many directors, critics, and theorists (from Bazin and Godard to Manovich and Herzog...): namely, what is cinema? The second is a question implied by cinematographic practise that marks the motion picture and, therefore, the theorizations of the aesthetic: the relationship with the real.

To clarify this issue, let us revisit one of the first texts of cinema theory: Hugo Münsterberg's *Photoplay*. Münsterberg, a philosopher as much as a psychologist, rejects the theory of art as imitation and applies his conception to cinema, a new type of art that is still in search of its own representative ways and is suspended between the realistic reproduction of the world and the metaphorical stylisation of reality. An artwork must go beyond the mechanism of mimesis to shape reality; in films we "have reality with all its true dimensions; and yet it keeps the fleeting, passing surface suggestion without true depth and fullness, as different from a mere picture as from a mere stage performance."<sup>2</sup> Its task is to represent emotions through images, "The real human persons and the real landscapes must be left behind and, as we saw, must be transformed into pictorial suggestions only. We must be strongly conscious of their pictorial unreality in order that that wonderful play of our inner experiences may be realized on the screen."<sup>3</sup> If it is true that every facet of an artwork seems to gratify people's implicit demand for a self-concordant and non-chaotic world, then, for Münsterberg, film can triumph over the *causality* of the world and become able to transcend space, time, and causal laws. Based on this assumption, Adriano Aprà, in the introduction to the Italian edition of *The Photoplay*, linked Münsterberg to another great theorist called André Bazin.

The ontological conception of the French critic starts from his idea of cinema: it appears to be able "to pick, like in a mirror, a glare of the world, too chaotic and accidental for being analysed in itself"<sup>4</sup> and replaces "à la réalité un monde imaginaire cohérent, ... à condition que

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<sup>2</sup> Hugo Münsterberg, *The photoplay: A Psychological Study* (New York: Appleton & Co., 1916) 56.

<sup>3</sup> Münsterberg, *The photoplay* 209.

<sup>4</sup> Adriano Aprà, Introduction, *Che cosa è il cinema?* by André Bazin (Milano: Garzanti, 1999) XI.

ce monde imaginaire rencontre la réalité.”<sup>5</sup> And so: “Reality produced by the cinema at will and which it organizes is the reality of the world of which we are part and of which the film receives a mould at once spatial and temporal.”<sup>6</sup> For Aprà:

the analyses of Bazin irreparably mark the end of fiction cinema and the intrusion of that ‘ontological’ notion of reality [...] the delight and the dilemma of the ‘60s: discovery of the cinema-verité, intrusion of the 16 millimetre techniques and of the live shooting in the narrative cinema, obsession or neurosis of the plan-sequence, attempt of synthesis of the two tendencies of the cinema (the Lumière-Méliès binomial).<sup>7</sup>

It is therefore a remodelling of the connection between the cine-camera and the profilmic; it can help to create a kind of print of the real that brings testimony and construction together. The filmed person is a real person that has been there, in front of the camera, but the filmed portrayal of the person is also a realization of the director and of the device itself.

There is then a further development that is well represented by the great Jean-Luc Godard (one of Bazin’s most important pupils): if one directs a film- which is, as Godard claimed, equivalent to taking the ‘side’ of the things<sup>8</sup> - the next step implies the constitution of reality and cinema in the same sphere. Godard argues in an article on *Pierrot le fou* in 1965 that “l’imaginaire et le réel sont nettement séparés [au cinéma] et pourtant ne font qu’un”,<sup>9</sup> and the cinema is “la restitution de la totalité du réel et de l’imaginaire: le moyen d’exploration: la caméra, instrument

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<sup>5</sup> Jacques Aumont, “Que reste-t-il du cinéma,” *Ontologia del cinema*, ed. Domenico Spinosa. *Rivista di Estetica* 46 (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2001) 28

<sup>6</sup> André Bazin, *What is cinema vol. I* (Los Angeles & Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 13.

<sup>7</sup> Aprà, Introduction XI.

<sup>8</sup> See Jean-Luc Godard and Alain Bergala, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard vol. I* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1998) 210-215.

<sup>9</sup> Godard and Bergala, *Jean-Luc Godard* 352.

sacré.”<sup>10</sup> To elucidate: in Godard’s movie, *La Chinoise*, the character of Kirilov (a revolutionary painter) quotes Paul Klee and argues that “art does not reproduce the visible, but makes [things] visible... the imaginary is not a reflection of the reality, but the reality of this reflex.” In these terms, “the reality to which cinema refers, cannot be found in the outside world, the referent, but in the movie itself, in the operation of cinematographic creation...”<sup>11</sup> The image itself does not have a simple descriptive function, it is not a mere reproduction of a world; it has become a world in itself, a field of forces and relations that brings its own being into itself. Actually, Godard’s point of view becomes, hereinafter, less tough: the cinema and the real are processed together, the imaginary cannot be separated from the real - (“things are there, why change them” Edgar, one of the main character, says in Godard’s *Éloge de l’amour*, citing Rossellini), it can sublimate it, but it can never deny it.

The image is never alienated by its existential nature, despite a continuous tension among “image-signe et image du monde,”<sup>12</sup> between representation and construction. Only the Seventh Art could represent, through multiform images, the powerful synthesis of real and virtual, of possible and actual. The hesitant Bazinian Godard believes in a cinema able to combine ontological realism and the conscience of the language, a cinema that can save reality through its representation.<sup>13</sup>

On that note, let us go back to Kim and to his particular way of making reality and abstraction coexist: sometimes, the Korean director’s starting point is the admission of the impossibility of remaking reality, which is why abstraction can take possession of the real, transfigure it, and bring out the ghosts of the unconsciousness that emerges from the darkness.

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<sup>10</sup> Christian Jacotey, “Jean-Luc Godard ou l’aventure cinématographique,” *Godard, au-delà du récit*. Spec. Issue of *Études cinématographiques* 57-61 (Paris: Minard, 1967) 78.

<sup>11</sup> Luigi Allegri, *Ideologia e linguaggio nel cinema contemporaneo: Jean-Luc Godard* (Parma: Università di Parma, 1976) 175.

<sup>12</sup> Joël Magny, “Les 24 Vérités de Jean-Luc Godard,” *Trente ans depuis*. Spec. Issue of *Cahiers du cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma livres, 1990) 101-103.

<sup>13</sup> See Giorgio De Vincenti, *Il concetto di modernità al cinema* (Parma: Pratiche Editrici, 1993) 41.

In this regard, *Real Fiction*, one of his most ambitious films, has many points in common with *Arirang* and is very representative. The oxymoronic title reveals Kim's desire to investigate the very problematic correlation between reproduction and construction, between true and false. The director himself is, perhaps, still uncertain about the ability of film to meld fiction and reality, to create worlds that shift the boundaries of what is considered real, and to create a fictional double for modifying its own matrix. That said, perhaps there is an area in which this connection is made effectual: the reality of the self, which is present in *Real Fiction*, can be conceptualized according to three different points of view: I, another, and the social self.<sup>14</sup> These points of view are confused and seem to overflow into each other, which allows the film to become a distorted mirror of psychological and social dynamics. The violence of the film and the revenge of the main character - a 'classic' plot device, that is present in both *Real Fiction* and *Arirang* - arose from the repressed, from the Unconscious, from a real desire, still never put into effect. They move in a space of instinctual emotions, which emerge in all their transforming power. Although the cinematic medium seems to represent Kim in the final cut of the two works, this representation is limited to Kim's own inner reality, not the outer reality: the film has been able to modify its protagonists but not the reality that surrounds them.

Then emerges an expressive register in which the autobiographic data is available to be used to overcome the opposition between outer reality and inner feeling. It is the image that realizes this overcoming artistically. In fact the image IS - it is visible, it has its own existence and subsistence, and, therefore, in a final analysis, it has its own ontological value. At the same time, the image fulfils a double requirement: the author makes his sensation visible through the image's representation of the external world while also making the reality of the inner sphere tangible. The images, thanks to the cinematographic medium and the new digital techniques of today, make sense a visible phenomenon, which allows it to exist as real external objects and actions.

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<sup>14</sup> See Vittorio Renzi, *Kim Ki-duk* (Roma: Dino Audino Editore, 2005) 84.

New digital technologies play a crucial role due to the way they can functionally mix inner and outer reality and make them appear related and easily interchangeable. The problem with these new technologies is the referent (the so-called indexicality). Various theorists have grappled with this fundamental problem to try to solve it, but it has remained largely unsolved. Some theorists speak of para-indexicality, a relationship in which the images on the screen are not indexes of a present reality but more of an absent one, indicating a “lack of something beyond or beside visualization”<sup>15</sup> in a rereading of the contrast between presentable and unrepresentable reality. Others approach this problem as an additional technological means to make a movie that helps creating content without actual filming.<sup>16</sup> As demonstrated by Kim in *Arirang*, the digital camera is lighter, more manoeuvrable, and, paradoxically, more suited to the faithful recording of reality (see, for example, one of the last masterpieces of Herzog *Cave of forgotten dreams*, in which the director along with geologists, historians of art, archaeologists, filmed with a very small camera and in 3D for the first time the Chauvet cave, discovered in France in the 90’s, with its nearly 500 cave paintings of 32,000 years ago, the oldest ever found).

In addition to the issues filmmakers face, it is important to consider the point of view of the spectator as well: is the spectator’s perception of the image affected when it is constructed? Francesco Casetti’s theory is exemplary in this regard,<sup>17</sup> which suggests that digital filmic images are in fact still able to develop problems that are significant; constructed images tell stories and can still engage the spectator, they may even affect the spectator in a stronger way because he or she is more and more involved in the representation. The intended message, Casetti tells us, is important to the structure of a film; it serves as a “constructive principle”. This procedure allows the filmmaker to “take control of the shock[s], convey and make them functional, leaving

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<sup>15</sup> Seung-hoon Jeong, “The Para-Indexicality of the Cinematic Image,” *Ontologia del cinema*, ed. Domenico Spinosa. *Rivista di Estetica* 46 (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2001) 89.

<sup>16</sup> See David Davies, “Digital Technology, Indexicality, and Cinema,” *Ontologia del cinema*, ed. Domenico Spinosa. *Rivista di Estetica* 46 (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> See especially Casetti 295 et seq.

them to operate". The proposals generated by the images are not left to act without control on the spectator; they could and should be combined according to a specific order based on an intellectual (but not solely intellectual) evaluation.

It is the same effect that is achieved by depth of field, which was considered by Bazin in *Evolution of Film Language*, in reference to some of Welles's and Wyler's films: it allows the spectator to constitute a connection with the image that is closer than the one he has with reality (structure is more realistic). The attitude of the spectator is more active, he can choose, unlike with the montage, and thus he can give a meaning to the image; depth of field reintroduces ambiguity in the structure of the image and creates uncertainty in the spectators.

Let us go back to *Arirang* and try to use some ideas that the great contemporary philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy gives us—they are the perfect gloss to all the theory we discussed earlier. According to Nancy, all art, cinema included, "has nothing to do with the world interpreted as simple exteriority, or as an environment such as nature, but with the to-be-in-the-world in its very being."<sup>18</sup> The peculiarity of cinema is its ability "to show the world" struggling "to release what is real from the cages of conceptual elaboration,"<sup>19</sup> and to make it real... The image steals the reality to the real and projects back to us a reality that is "renewed, clarified, and sealed."<sup>20</sup> As we try to find our gaze, the image engages it, "makes it vigilant towards the real... [and] ...replaces t visions, insights, and abstractions of all kinds" to organize the real.<sup>21</sup> It is the gaze of the film into itself and its world and a seeing and judgement of people and characters. From this point of view, the aforementioned scene from *Arirang* (Kim re-sees his confession on a computer screen and laughs at himself) establishes - as long as the act of looking

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<sup>18</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le muse* (Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 2006) 37.

<sup>19</sup> Domenico Spinoso, "Lo sguardo del cinema. Nota sull'ontologia dell'immagine filmica nel pensiero di Jean-Luc Nancy," *Ontologia del cinema*, ed. Domenico Spinoso. *Rivista di Estetica* 46 (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2001, p. 181)

<sup>20</sup> Spinoso, "Lo sguardo del cinema..." 180.

<sup>21</sup> Spinoso, "Lo sguardo del cinema..." 180.



in Kim's cinema often implies an identification process-<sup>22</sup> a sort of identification short circuit: the director who re-sees himself recognizes himself in his own character, or the opposite occurs and the character of the director re-sees the real Kim who confesses to the camera. Kim is aware of these paradoxes: he himself, after laughing and crying, alludes to the spectator's doubt that this outburst is just part of a story, which is made more compelling by the exhibited suffering. Kim plays with the spectator, but he probably does it in order to protect the reality behind the fiction, to prevent the spectator from the confusion between them leading the one and the other to mutual confusion.

This scene recalls other sequences from Kim's cinema in which the gaze, the vision of the self or the other passes through a mirror or a device. In *Breath*, the prison warden, played by the director himself, acts as a sort of silent demiurge by spying on the protagonists and influencing their relational dynamics, the development of their lives, and their mutual feeling. In *Bad Guy*, the main character attends helplessly to the path of abjection through a one way mirror. He traps a prostitute who is only guilty of refusing him and then punishes himself in a vision of cruelty inflicted on those he loves...

The reality of Kim's films is dominated by this dialectic of seeing and not seeing, a gaze that goes beyond the visible: it explores (recreates) the invisible, and becomes invisible until it looks inside itself.<sup>23</sup> His cinema is a cinema of I, a subjective and autobiographical one, but it is not less open to the totality of human experience and often becomes a "place of dreamlike or desiderative retelling."<sup>24</sup>

The problem is communicational too: communication seems impossible, and likewise, every act of sharing is denied. In *Arirang*, Kim is like the characters of his films; he is silent and alone, waiting for something or someone who can free him from the absurd and bring him back

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<sup>22</sup> See Hye Seung Chung, *Kim Ki-duk* (Chicago: Illinois University Press, 2012) 85.

<sup>23</sup> See Davide Morello, *Kim Ki-duk* (Venezia: Libreria Editrice Cafoscarina, 2006) 14.

<sup>24</sup> Andrea Bellaviva, *Kim Ki-duk* (Milano: Il Castoro Cinema, 2005) 167.

to reality<sup>25</sup>; he does not have anyone who will listen and empathize with his emotions. Therefore, the only possible empathy is the one he has with his own art. The culmination of this process is achieved when the director re-sees (another device to mediate...) himself as a character in *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring*: he is the monk that carries a boulder on his back, to make amends for the sins he carries, and leans it together with a statue of Buddha on a high hill that dominates the surrounding landscape. The style of the scene is documentary though the redundant music and the theme refer to philosophical issues and lead to abstraction. The director, as the character Kim, gets rid of his ghosts,<sup>26</sup> while the monk ceases to be a character and becomes the director himself, a man who “reflects on his life”<sup>27</sup> or better, he is both, he splits. The story is now “autobiographical [...] in an ontological sense.”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, in *Arirang*, this vision seems to produce a sort of catharsis; Kim seems to be able to be liberated from his guilty conscience so he can return to his normal life and direct a movie, which—for him—appears to be synonymous with living. He can return to see reality, but he needs film to do so, and, as he himself says in a press conference, “my films are the eyes through which I look at the reality.” And elsewhere: “To me there's a world that exist just for my eyes to see.”<sup>29</sup>

The cinema of Kim is, to paraphrase Pasolini, both realistic and dreamlike: it starts from reality—from realism in reproducing and recording actions, bodies, movements, and gestures but it becomes gradually abstract and symbolic. The built image always has a foundation in physical reality, but it is contaminated by the surreal and fantastic and refers to an absent or dreamed reality. The cinema allows on one hand to “get rid of false images,”<sup>30</sup> “to see the

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<sup>25</sup> See Cédric Lagandrè, “Spoken. Words in Suspense,” *Kim Ki-duk*, ed. Danièle Rivière (Paris: Dis Voir, 2005) 60.

<sup>26</sup> See Renzi, *Kim Ki-duk* 98.

<sup>27</sup> Hye Seung Chung, *Kim Ki-duk* 109.

<sup>28</sup> Hye Seung Chung, *Kim Ki-duk* 110.

<sup>29</sup> Marta Merajver-Kurlat, *Kim Ki-duk: On Movies, the Visual Language* (New York: Jorge Pinto Books Inc., 2005) pos. 888)

<sup>30</sup> Adrien Gombeaud, “Break on Trough,” *Kim Ki-duk*, ed. Danièle Rivière (Paris: Dis Voir, 2005) 32.

mountain as a mountain and the water as water,”<sup>31</sup> and to represents the exact proportions of the world. But on the other hand it presents “the borderline where the painfully real and the imaginative hopefully meet,”<sup>32</sup> in which reality and the imaginary find points and zones of adhesion and junction. For Kim, “white and black are the same colour” and this identity transforms and redefines them as the imaginary and the real. Reality can be transformed into an art object while objects sometimes lose their function and obtain another one.

Kim has stated in some interviews that he wants to show life through images and describes his creative process as follows: the script is realistic at first, and is then changed through abstraction. When pressed for a definition of his cinema, he uses the term “fantastic-realism.”<sup>33</sup> Here arises the tension between the tangible and intangible and the real and mental, which is also expressed in the representation of space as something that is transformed, passing continuously from one domain to another. Paradigmatic in this regard is the finale of *The Island* in which the main character loses himself in a cane field that in the subsequent zoom will be revealed as the pubis of Hee jin, his dead drowned lover.

Kim’s cinema is the “cinema of liminality, of the boundary between dream and reality.”<sup>34</sup> It is expressed, in a somewhat didactic way, in the final writing of *3-Iron*: as human beings we cannot distinguish whether the world in which we live is a dream or reality. It thus makes explicit the idea of Cavell, who re-formulates Descartes and his first meditation suggesting that the cinematic image documents that “there are no conclusive indications by which waking life can be distinguished from sleep.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Kim in Gombeaud, *Kim Ki-duk* 32.

<sup>32</sup> Hye Seung Chung, *Kim Ki-duk* 123.

<sup>33</sup> See Danièle Rivière and Kim Ki-duk, “Black and white are the same color,” *Kim Ki-duk*, ed. Danièle Rivière (Paris: Dis Voir, 2005) 114, and Andrea Bellaviva, *Kim Ki-duk* (Milano: Il Castoro Cinema, 2005) 14.

<sup>34</sup> Renzi, *Kim Ki-duk* 36.

<sup>35</sup> Stanley Cavell, *Cavell on film* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005) 7.

Many of Kim's films end with this ambiguity. Some, like the ones we have just discussed, are explicitly ambiguous while others achieve ambiguity in a more subtle way: from *Bad Guy*, (the main character is dying and is his romance with the prostitute just a last wish?) to *The Samaritan*, (Does or doesn't kill the father his teenage prostitute daughter?).

As a perfect gloss for Kim's cinema, of which *Arirang* is a sort of summary, let us consider the definition of the Seventh Art given by Samuel Fuller (with whom Kim is often compared) in *Pierrot le fou*: "A film is like a battleground... Love ... Hate ... Action ... Violence ... And Death. In one word: Emotion." Emotion (so intense it incorporates fantasy and reality) is the source from which the concreteness, abstraction, reality, and imaginary facets of Kim's cinema arise. Images are the perfect vehicles for these emotions. Or better: they are the only possible vehicles, as the prophetic intuition of Münsterberg shows: "the photoplay of the day after tomorrow will surely be freed from all elements which are not really pictures."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Münsterberg, *Photoplay* 200.

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# REFRAINS AND THE 'CINEMATIC LISTENING' OF THE SONGS IN THE MOVIE *ONCE*

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Songs imprint multiple shades upon the rhythmic texture of movies. The presence of songs in cinematic works adds an experiential layer that goes beyond the act of listening and percolates the entire movie experience, while offering the basis for thinking about Time as an indispensable material in the creation of art. Therefore, it is important to shed light on the assemblages used by filmmakers to deal with different elements (henceforth referred to as 'refrains') of language, fiction, image, sound, and thought. In the History of Western musical culture, refrains have become a means to define mnemonic retention modes and, consequently, shape the listeners' expectations over a song. When reimagined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1997), refrains gained a philosophical understanding materialized in the form of three modes or movements of Time. This essay discusses the refrains presented on feature film *Once* (John Carney, Ireland, 2006). This movie explores songs as a source of expression to instigate viewers, supported by the philosophical understanding of refrains, to rethink the heterogeneous pace of Time as a virtual – and thus vital – force in the creation of art.

## Introduction

This essay discusses the particularities concerning the use of songs in movies and how such combination provides for a unique audio-visual experience and instigates philosophical thoughts on time and art. The empathetic connection between songs and fiction drama pictures has yielded relevant theoretical explorations of different time arrangements involving narrative structures, imagery, acting, and singing in movies. The experimentations tried by a number of filmmakers could potentially lead art thinking to focus on the identification of the unique features of 'cinematic song listening.' Therefore, this essay discusses ideas concerning the nature of songs and how songs affect the expressive scope of a movie, in addition to attempting to show that the cinematic experience can transmute the act of listening to a song into a different experience altogether.

The discussion presented herein is supported by the definition of refrain (or *ritornello*) posited by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and looks into the expressive coexistence of a

movie's storyline and the formal unique characteristics of movie songs. This definition helps reconsider the creation of sensations in art and understand the games played by artists while dealing with time rhythms (or the future of processes of becoming) materialized in the form of imagery, plasticity, sounds, memory works, and language. Feature film *Once* (Ireland, 2006), a musical written and directed by John Carney, was the object of the theoretical speculations presented in this essay.

### **1. The Refrains of Becoming, Language, and Art**

First, one needs to understand that, in Western music history, the invisibility of sound provided the act of listening with specific strategies devised to add an imaginary ability to return to specific moments in time during the course of a musical experience. In this sense, the refrain works as a symbolic tool to define mnemonic retention modes and, consequently, regulate the listeners' expectations over the song. This effect – a frequently used resource when one wishes to return to specific phrases, parts, or even the beginning of a song – operates through metric and melody repetitions. Historically, refrains have established a formal dimension within Western music experience, to become a vital resource in song writing.

Nevertheless, in Deleuze and Guattari the refrain assumed a philosophical understanding that is diverse from the meaning traditionally assigned to it in music, an understanding that yielded a relevant and novel approach to rethinking the issues concerning art. And for the purposes of this essay, Deleuze and Guattari's ideas may help understand the use of songs in movies not only as combinations of audio-visual, musical, and narrative elements, but rather as a mode of composition that uses art's raw material: the heterogeneous refrains of Time.

The three types of refrain described by the two authors are intrinsically bound to each other. Ontological by nature, the first type of refrain suggests the existence of a primary self-differentiation of the movement of Time through intense, invisible, immeasurable modulations that continually recreate the world. These modulations have neither shape nor substance, but

their persistence allows reality to be expressed as a perceptive phenomenon. Indeed, refrains of this type are the vibrating chords of processes of becoming (or *devenirs*): they are the imminent future. Although virtual and ethereal, these refrains last for long enough to become actual and material. And as a result of the unpredictable shifts caused by past and future meeting each other, nature is preserved and – paradoxically – renewed.

The second type of refrain reflects ways of solving the infinite problems of existence. Although produced by every life form in the planet, this essay looks into the manifestations of second type refrains produced by humans. This type of refrain was developed as a cultural instrument designed to tame the first refrains through the likes of language, systems, codes, laws, habits, protocol, conventions, patterns, measurements, institutions, and machines. One of the most remarkable examples of this effort is the refrain in its multiple musical meanings. Refrains are the responses of different types of memories (remembrance, reminiscence, anamnesis) to the unpredictable modulations of processes of becoming in Time. They are elements pertaining to mnemonic education, which attempt to deal with the world's relentless renewal. Without the second type of refrain, social life would not be possible. Even one's personal subjectivity is shaped by refrains of the second type.

Lastly, refrains of the third type are creative subterfuges accessed when the artist challenges second type refrains, thus allowing the experience to exist for a short time in its usual duration and then spill over into other regimes, metaphorically tearing the semiotic veils that inhibit the living sensations inherent to processes of becoming. These movements give rise to alternatives unrelated to the artist's original intent. The third refrain type in art is, indeed, a unique different and differentiating return to the processes of becoming. In short, refrains of this type are the paradoxes artists embed into cadences of meaning (habits of conventional memory work), which, even if for just an instant, allow access to the liberating virginal sensations of the refrains of the first type.

In sum, refrains of the first type are the transient modulations of unexpressed forces of Time, within which the real world is continually expressed and recreated. Refrains of the second type are cultural tools designed to tame chance and processes of becoming by encoding first type refrains into controllable repetitions. Refrains of the third type in art create experimental movements from refrains of the second type and dismantle them, consequently generating virginal sensations. Art appears to live off of the game of making and undoing refrains, by letting one briefly enjoy life's memories and experiences, only to present a reality in which predictability and mnemonic cultural habits are suspended.

## **2. Songs and movies**

In addition to trying to define the forms of songs and differentiate them from strictly musical composition, this essay examines the formal, aesthetic, and cultural aspects uniquely associated with songs and analyses the creative consubstantiation of songs amid the other sounds presented throughout the film's storyline. First, the formal properties of songs vis-à-vis other sounds and musical and lyrical expressions requires some explanation. Songs are defined as the integration between musical elements, vocalized words, and other optional sound features. Speech, singing, meaning, and musical signs merge as a song is written. In a shorter definition, songs arise from the intersection between language and music. The sung word is assigned a melodic destiny while it concomitantly alters the melodic idea. Songs engender scansions and rhythms, amalgamating phrases (sharing stories or aural images with the listener), vocal performances, and the means to conserve word sounds within a musical system.

A wide array of expressions may arise from the meeting of film and song to enhance the telling of a story and both the auditory and overall cinematic experience produced by a movie. Songs help set the pace at which the plot unfolds, becoming the organic thread to which all other elements in the movie are connected and through which the story is told. There are no formal frameworks prescribing how songs ought to be used in movies, as their use is mostly empirical.

The relevance and role of a song in relation to other elements of action, dialogue, and background noise may produce a sensation of timelessness or even suspend notions of time altogether.

The cinema universe has welcomed songs and their manifestations openheartedly. According to Michel Chion, songs are cinematic elements that pervade the viewer's memory to become associated with situations of existence, thus expressing facets of human fate. The ephemeral nature of songs – a representation of the ever-changing relations between individuals, society, and the world – brings forth an intense and different emotional appeal when played as part of a filmic performance. There have been circumstances in which songs known to the world long before they were released with a movie had equal transit within the confines of cinema and well beyond it. A song, even when deemed kitsch or categorized as part of the 'easy listening' genre, for instance, might elicit different meanings depending on the context in which it is played, yielding a most interesting cinematic effect. Songs affect us subtly: at the same time as they provide comfort to our aural experience, they surprise us and invite us to feel the movie in a completely different way. More than merely combining sound, music, voices, songs, fiction, performance, imagery, technique, and design, filmmakers start from the idea that singing causes viewers to synchronically see movie images and hear the story differently.

The songs played during the course of everyday life events and fictional situations portrayed in movies interact and occur concurrently with other elements of the soundtrack – music, words, sound, noise, or silence – to add layers to the cinematic experience. Two scenes in which singing appears as a strategy to reminisce about extreme life situations are worth citing here. In *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968), when supercomputer Hal is being deactivated by the last living astronaut (Keir Dullea) in the spaceship, it starts singing *Daisy Bell (Bicycle Built For Two)*, a popular song written in 1892 by Harry Dacre known for the catchy chorus 'Daisy, Daisy / Give me your answer, do / I'm half crazy / All for the love of you' ending with the words 'a bicycle built for two,' which Hal claims to have learned in its childhood. In *Alien*

(Ridley Scott, 1979), character Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) sings the old Broadway tune *You Are My Lucky Star* (Nacio Herb Brown and Arthur Freed, 1935) as she tries to overcome the fear of facing the monster from outer space. Songs can enhance and even help build the storyline by offering a combined musical and linguistic experience. They can be edited into a musical score or a theme, or may appear randomly or at times be interrupted, inserted during action scenes, dialogues, or entire sequences. Songs may also work as a dramatic core, determining the formal pace of the movie, or might condense or stretch the perceived time of the narrative. Additionally, songs do not have to be necessarily connected to the concatenation of scenes in the movie, thus working as a ‘bubble of freedom,’ nor do they explicitly require a reason to take part in the storyline.

### 3. Refrains in *Once*

Filmmakers explore fictional situations through the use of songs, as singing affects movie viewers in ways that neither isolated speech nor music can. In other words, when integrated into a movie, songs enable viewers to undergo what may be referred to as a ‘cinematic listening’ experience, as is particularly the case in John Carney’s *Once* (2006). The plot revolves around the affective/creative process the lead couple in the movie goes through while writing songs together. And the songs they write and perform guide the aural, visual, and narrative cinematic experience. Carney invites viewers to rethink the use of refrains of time in audio-visual art.

The director tells a story of musical and personal empathy between two people, the unnamed characters Guy and Girl, both facing a crossroads in their lives in Dublin. John Carney directs former band mate Glen Hansard and newcomer Markéta Irglová in a kind of ‘boy meets girl’ tale. The Guy (Hansard) performs on Grafton Street, a shopping street in Dublin. Attracted by his singing, the Girl, a young Czech immigrant selling flowers in the streets played by Irglová, approaches him to talk about his songs. The following day they meet and she tells him that she, too, is a musician. She takes him to a musical instrument store where she occasionally plays the

piano and impresses him by playing a piece from Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*. He then asks her to add a piano arrangement to one of his songs and teaches her the basic chords for *Falling Slowly* (Glen Hansard and Markéta Irglová), which they play and sing together. On the next scene, on the bus home, he musically tells her what his songs are about: a long-time girlfriend who cheated on him. Later, the Girl sings to herself the lyrics she wrote to one of the Guy's songs while walking down the street. He is thinking and writing about his ex-girlfriend who moved to London. The Girl encourages him to win her back. He decides it is time to move to London, but first he wants to record a demo tape of his songs and invites the Girl to join him. They secure a bank loan and buy some time at a recording studio. The Guy calls on his busker friends (Gerard Hendrick, Alastair Foley, Hugh Walsh) and the band goes to the recording studio. Eamon (Geoff Minogue), the studio engineer, is impressed with their first song, *When Your Mind's Made Up* (Glen Hansard and Markéta Irglová). During a break in the wee hours of the morning, the Girl finds a piano in an empty room and plays one of her songs to the Guy, *The Hill* (Markéta Irglová). The sequence following the end of the recording session is exemplary: the band closes the studio doors, gets in the car, and pops the demo tape in the car's stereo. As the song plays all other background noises are muted, while scenes of the band driving in the car and having fun on the beach are shown. The scene was edited to match the length of the song, and as the song ends the background noise fades back in. Later the Girl reveals to the Guy her husband is coming to Dublin to live with her. The Guy plays the demo tape to his father, who then gives him some money to help him get settled in London. Before leaving, the Guy buys the Girl a piano as a gift.

The expressive solutions given by the director in the movie are also experimental, such as cameras hidden behind building windows and internal microphones used while shooting on location in the streets of Dublin. When friends gathered to sing and drink at a pub, Carney shot the entire sequence as a documentary, giving the scenes a natural feel. With realistic performances – both professional and amateur-like –, the songs are edited and played in myriad

ways throughout the movie, at times as a musical score track, with or without background noise, amid silence, during dialogues and as the narrative unfolds, and even as the credits are rolling at the end of the movie. *Once* manages to combine the diegetic (the source of sound is visible on the screen or implied by what is shown in the scene), meta-diegetic (sound originated in the mind of a character, thus not heard by other characters present in the scene), and extra-diegetic (the source of sound is neither present nor implied in the scene; sounds are heard by the audience but not by the characters) manifestations of songs with surprising results. At times the song is played only to the movie viewers, and then it is sung simultaneously in different contexts and places by different characters, transitioning freely between diegetic planes.

The narrative structure in *Once* keeps the movie off the beaten path trailed by most mainstream musical films. Instead of a typical love story, the movie shows the subtle approximation of two people guided by their musical and compositional interests. The occurrence of the three types of refrains in the movie *Once* may be summarized as follows: refrains of the first type reflect the on-going past facing unpredictable processes of becoming affected by the relentless force of time while expressing the perceived durations of phenomenal existence. The second refrain type includes memories, feelings, personal and professional goals, the cultural environment, technical filmmaking devices, and the refrains of the songs. The dramaturgical structure designed by Carney uses sensations, sound, voices, acting, editing, and speech to destabilize refrains of the second type and strip the viewer of his/her expectations.

## Conclusion

*Once* emblematically shows that when embodied in a movie, song refrains become relevant co-participants in a larger rhythmic texture weaved from multiple refrains. The three refrain types described by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, each in a specific way, play a significant role in the innovative and creative power of Carney's movie. The director and the characters/songwriters deal with contrasting paradoxes arising from subtle disruptions in their



expectations shaped by their memories and life experiences. The strategy used in these refrains to create dramaturgical songs revolves around repeating something and then modifying what was repeated using a rhythm stemming from processes of becoming. Creativity in art invites viewers-listeners not only to acknowledge dynamic motion or visual and aural images, but also to recreate refrains and experience different unique sensations.

In short, John Carney completely redesigned the experience of listening to the songs written for the movie *Once*. The viewer's memory, no longer occupied with ordinary work, is not guided to relate to a specific form, but rather to be surprised. Touched by paradoxes that harness the unpredictable force of the processes of becoming, the viewer's 'cinematic listening' is called upon to catapult him/her from commonplace song listening to a unique sensorial experience. When invited to go beyond the simple recognition of musical or lyrical elements, one is pushed into an open experimentation of the world's ever-restarting processes of becoming. Finally, art is an effort to reinvent, entirely and in different ways, the power of being affected by the virginal sensations arising from the first type of refrains of Time.

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## **“A SEXTET FOR OVERLAPPING SOLOISTS” – POLYCHRONIC TEMPORALITIES IN TYKWER’S AND THE WACHOWSKIS’ *CLOUD ATLAS***

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The paper proposes an interpretation of Tom Tykwer’s and Andy and Lana Wachowski’s film *Cloud Atlas* through the lens of Nietzsche’s concept of eternal recurrence which serves as the overriding framework of the film. Within that framework other temporal scales are embedded: human time, evolutionary time, physics time, mechanical time and historical time. By juxtaposing the multiple time frames the film enacts the concept of transmigration of souls and a sophisticated reflection on the interconnectedness of individuals and the experience of time in the digital age.

In the 1990s a new trend emerged in world cinema, the polychronic film, which juxtaposes multiple temporalities, and in so doing reflects a shift in our understanding of time in the digital era. The altered sense of time, very divergent from linear time, has been influenced by the accelerated temporal rhythms of late capitalism as well as by the information culture and people’s entanglement in global communication networks. The temporal relations in the polychronic film are governed by new paradigms of causality, which refute cause-effect relationships to engage in multi-directional relations. The atemporal film, as Garrett Stewart elucidates, takes the form of “the spatialized configuration of time itself as in its own right a malleable medium,”<sup>1</sup> and is characterized by time being “framed in its change rather than just derived from a change in moving frame.”<sup>2</sup> A number of critics have referred to this strand in cinema with different names: “modular narratives” (Cameron), “atemporal” (McGowan), “alternative plots” (Berg), “framed time” (Stewart), “puzzle films” (Buckland), “complex

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<sup>1</sup> Garrett Stewart, *Framed Time: Toward a Postfilmic Cinema* (London, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008) 2.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart, *Framed Time* 6.

narratives” (Simons), “the mind-game film” (Elsaesser) and “mindfucks” (Eig).<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the polychronic film always comments on human consciousness, be it memory, dreams, trauma, psychic disturbances and illnesses, or other altered states of consciousness. Because of this connection of the atemporal film with the human mind, Patricia Pisters has called it “the neuro-image,” while Stewart has coined the term “cinnemonics.”<sup>4</sup>

Tom Tykwer’s and Andy and Lana Wachowski’s *Cloud Atlas* (2012) is one of the films that feature polychronic temporalities as it embeds multiple timescapes within the frame to demonstrate how individuals function at their intersection. The temporal fabric of the film is woven from human time, the mythical time of eternal return, evolutionary time, physics time, mechanical time and historical time. By juxtaposing plural time frames the film enacts the concept of holistic identity and a sophisticated reflection on the interconnectedness of individuals and the experience of time in the globalized digital age.

### **The narrative structure of the film**

The film, a brilliant translation into cinematic language of David Mitchell’s novel *Cloud Atlas*<sup>5</sup> (2004), takes the viewer on a cinematic journey stretching across time and the globe, from 1849 to a post-apocalyptic age, from Pacific islands to a colony on a different planet. Mitchell’s novel consists of six stories in different genres, each cut in mid-sentence to make room for another

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<sup>3</sup> See Allan Cameron, *Modular Narratives in Contemporary Cinema*, Houndmills (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Todd McGowan, *Out of Time: Desire in Atemporal Cinema* (London, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Charles Ramirez Berg, “A Taxonomy of Alternative Plots in Recent Films: Classifying the “Tarantino Effect,”” *Film Criticism*, 31.1/2 (2006): 5-61; Stewart, *Framed Time*; ed. Warren Buckland, *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009); Warren Buckland ed., *Hollywood Puzzle Films* (New York, London: Routledge, 2014); Thomas Elsaesser, “The Mind-Game Film,” *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*, ed., Buckland, 13-41; Jan Simons, “Complex Narratives,” *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 6.2 (2008): 111-126; Jonathan Eig, “A Beautiful Mind(fuck): Hollywood Structures of Identity,” *Jump Cut* <<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc46.2003/eig.mindfilms/>>.

<sup>4</sup> See Patricia Pisters, *The Neuro-Image. A Deleuzian Film-Philosophy of Digital Screen Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012); Stewart, *Framed Time* 3.

<sup>5</sup> I discuss the novel in chapter two of my *Shapes of Time in British Twenty-First Century Quantum Fiction* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015) 73-95.

narrative, and then finished in the reverse order. The narratives are nested in each other like Chinese boxes or Russian matryoshka dolls, yet the embeddings do not follow the order of appearance in the novel; it is the central story, the unbroken narrative located in the middle of the book, that is the primary narrative. Conversely, in the film the stories are arranged in short chopped-up sequences, alternating among the six plotlines. The frequent switches between the stories, along with the reflexive structure, arrest the progression of time. Although the stories seem to be temporally anchored, which is announced by temporal and spatial markers, the illusion of chronological linearity and coherence is quickly shattered as the eternally repeated patterns destabilize any sense of sequential temporality and contribute to narrative holes through which other universes can be spotted. The shifts between the temporal layers prevent the viewer from ordering the events in succession because the different stories do not belong to the same time sequence; as Ursula Heise explains, “while events proceed at one level, they are suspended at the other levels until the narrative focus returns to them.” In the meantime, the temporal intervals between the stories are filled in by recursion, that is, “a narrative that is not its own, but that of another moment in time.”<sup>6</sup>

### **The mythical time of eternal recurrence**

The concept of eternal recurrence is the overriding framework that structures the film, and within that framework other temporal scales are inscribed. Nietzsche’s doctrine assumes that time is infinite but the number of permutations of events is finite and therefore they must be repeated eternally. As Nietzsche’s theory is problematical and ambiguous at times, there is no unanimity among scholars whether he endorses the recurrence of the same or the different.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ursula K. Heise, *Chronoschisms. Time, Narrative and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 61.

<sup>7</sup> Because Nietzsche’s theory is problematical, Joan Stambaugh recommends that its interpretations must “‘go beyond’ Nietzsche’s writings, published or unpublished, on the subject ... If one adheres strictly to eternal return, it is impossible to ‘solve’ the enormous problems inherent in his thought.” Joan Stambaugh, *Nietzsche’s Thought of Eternal Return* (John Hopkins, 1972) 103.

*Cloud Atlas*, however, effects eternal recurrence as in Gilles Deleuze's interpretation: what returns is not the same but the difference itself, in other words, events do not return in exactly the same arrangement but *patterns* of events do. As he elucidates, it is the different and the chance that recur in the process.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, what returns in all the stories in *Cloud Atlas* is patterns, active forces that create history: greed, violence, the will to power, the struggle for freedom, the search for love. The cyclical character of these forces eschews the linearity of history and its unidirectionality, and refutes the western idea of progress. One of the demonstrations of this is the fact that Zachry's story, taking place in the twenty-fourth century, does not feature the most advanced society, but a Stone Age one, thematizing the eternal return of rise and fall.

The film enacts the eternal return by means of overlappings, coincidences, uncanny instants of recognition, dreams and feelings of déjà vu as well as recurrent motifs, themes and images, a method encapsulated in the idea of Frobisher's (Ben Whishaw) hypnotic *Cloud Atlas Sextet*: "a sextet for overlapping soloists': piano, clarinet, 'cello, flute, oboe and violin, each in its own language of key, scale and colour,"<sup>9</sup> whose whole movements he has written "imagining us meeting again and again in different lives, in different ages."<sup>10</sup> The "overlapping soloists" refer not only to the connections between the stories, underlined by haunting musical motifs, but also to the protagonists of each story who are incarnations of the same consciousness travelling through time. They share a comet-shaped birthmark which symbolizes the interconnectedness, "a continuity within a pattern of difference," "a marker of a common genetic makeup."<sup>11</sup> In the film, additionally, the same actors appear in most of the stories, switching genders and races, which is the film's expansion on the subject of the eternal recurrence and the transmigration of

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<sup>8</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London and New York: Continuum, 2001) 126.

<sup>9</sup> David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (London: Sceptre, 2004) 463.

<sup>10</sup> Tom Tykwer, Andy and Lana Wachowski, dir., *Cloud Atlas*, X-Filme Creative Pool, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Jay Clayton, "Genome Time: Post-Darwinism then and now," *Critical Quarterly*, 55.1 (2013): 71.

souls. The intrusions of one time-stream or self into another are revealed, for instance, in Zachry's (Tom Hanks) dream of the events from other timelines, cascading through time, and when Frobisher composes *Cloud Atlas Sextet* which a record-store clerk, played by the same actor, cannot stop listening to thirty-seven years later and which Luisa (Halle Berry) claims to know although she couldn't have heard it. The film also features direct references to Nietzsche's concept: the title of one of the compositions by Frobisher and Ayrs (Jim Broadbent) duet is "Eternal Recurrence" and Goose (Tom Hanks) claims that Ewing's (Jim Sturgess) brain is inhabited by a worm whose shape in the picture Goose shows him is that of the Ouroboros.

The film's exposition signals the themes of interconnectedness and eternal return by opening with the image of undivided world in which Zachry has a holistic insight into his past lives and sees himself as a part of the ancestral pattern: "Wind like this, full of voices. It's the ancestry howlin' at ya; yibberin' the stories'. All voices tied up into one."<sup>12</sup> Then the fragmentation of the holistic unity of voices is heralded by laying them out as "li[ves] shedded off"<sup>13</sup> Zachry. The image of Zachry sitting at the fire in the opening and closing sequences of the film bookends the tale of his other incarnations, "all the lifes my soul ever was till far-far-back b'fore the Fall."<sup>14</sup> While the protagonists of the other stories only share the subconscious knowledge, Zachry is the only one who is aware that they are his other selves. This is underlined by his declaration, "One voice different, one voice whispering out there, spying from the dark. Now, find you devil, Old Georgie hisself. Now you hear up close and I'll yarn you about the first time we met eye to eye,"<sup>15</sup> after which the film cuts to the next story where Zachry's 'I' morphs into Ewing's 'I' as another incarnation of the same consciousness, and Ewing continues Zachry's tale, stating, "And thus it

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<sup>12</sup>Tykwer, the Wachowskis, dir., *Cloud Atlas*.

<sup>13</sup>Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* 302.

<sup>14</sup>Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* 302.

<sup>15</sup>Tykwer, the Wachowskis, dir., *Cloud Atlas*.

was that I made the acquaintance of Dr. Henry Goose.”<sup>16</sup> Zachry thus identifies with Ewing, another character with a birthmark, rather than with Goose, although both Zachry and Goose are played by Tom Hanks. Goose stands here for the “devil” that Zachry/Ewing meets “eye to eye.” After that the other stories are announced *in medias res*, all at the moment when Zachry’s other incarnations find themselves in dangerous situations, meeting the devil “eye to eye” (Rey is being followed, Frobisher is about to commit suicide, Sonmi (Doona-Bae) is interrogated before the execution); only Cavendish (Jim Broadbent) is safe to explain the structure of the memoir/film.

The transition points among the short cut-up sequences are organized by the eternally recurrent patterns. These patterns refer to the themes (of truth, belief, freedom), and the similarities between the life trajectories of the characters (imprisonment, escape, dangerous situation), and the objects that thread the stories together and constitute a part of many universes (Goose rips the turquoise buttons off Ewing’s vest, while Zachry in another story finds one of them in the forest; Frobisher writes letters to Sixsmith (James D’Arcy) which Luisa reads in another spacetime, and so on). One of the most important motifs connecting the micro-sequences is the motif of the door. For instance, Zachry promises to take Meronym (Halle Berry) “to the devil’s door”; then the film cuts to Cavendish’s story where a gate opens and the Aurora House receptionist says, “This way.” After this a metal door to Hae-Joo Chang’s (Jim Sturgess) apartment opens in another story and he says to Sonmi, “Come.” After the switch, Meronym resumes the action, coming through the door, and so forth. The door typically symbolizes passage from one world or state or mentality to another, between the known and the unknown; it indicates the beginning, the end or change,<sup>17</sup> and so it does in the film. The metaphor of the door opening and closing serves Sonmi to explain the transformation of one self into another: “I believe

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<sup>16</sup>Tykwer, the Wachowskis, dir., *Cloud Atlas*.

<sup>17</sup>Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli [A Dictionary of Symbols]* (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, 2006) 70.



death is only a door, when it closes, another opens. If I care to imagine heaven, I would imagine a door opening.”<sup>18</sup> The door thus represents the connectivity of incarnations, and the transitions between the stories become transitions between the selves.

The most significant trait of the connected protagonists’ character is their resistance to a *status quo* in which the Darwinian prerogative, “The Weak are Meat the Strong do Eat,”<sup>19</sup> appears to be a paradigm that governs the course of history. The driving force of history and progress is rigid mechanical time, described by Walter Benjamin in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” a text influenced by Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal return, as “homogenous empty time.”<sup>20</sup> The time is “empty” because it is filled with repetitive meaningless activities, disregarding psychological nuances of lived time, leading to dehumanization, depersonalization and obliteration of the living temporal being.<sup>21</sup> Benjamin argues that the advancement of mankind through a homogenous empty time is strictly connected with the historical progress.<sup>22</sup> In other words, the dominant conception of time hinges on labour-time and without subjecting people to it, progress, understood as the advancement of civilization, is impossible. The restoration of civilization after the Fall depends upon the return to linear mechanical time: “*Civ’lize needs time, an’ if we let this clock die, time’ll die too, an’ then how can we bring back the Civ’lized Days as it was b’fore the Fall?*”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Tykwer, the Wachowskis, dir., *Cloud Atlas*.

<sup>19</sup> Tykwer, the Wachowskis, dir., *Cloud Atlas*.

<sup>20</sup> See Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1968).

<sup>21</sup> Rhiannon Firth, Andrew Robinson, “For the Past yet to Come: Utopian Conceptions of Time and Becoming,” *Time & Society*, May 21 (2013): 5.

<sup>22</sup> Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” 261.

<sup>23</sup> Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* 257. Italics in original.

Mechanical time, accompanied by the oppressiveness of the linearity of history and progress, stands in opposition to the heterogeneity of human, mythical, evolutionary, digital and physics time, all of which encode multiplicity and contingency. Therefore, even if the future demonstrates itself as the hopeless eternal recurrence of past violence, abuse and colonization, the possibility of rewriting the future is not abstracted from the notion of eternal return. Nietzsche affirms the eternal return as a vehicle for renarrativization that encodes in itself an amplified sense of temporal possibility. He refutes linear progressivism – for him each moment is as abundant in possibilities as a new throw of the dice.<sup>24</sup> His concept of becoming assumes self-redefinition and the concept of identity as a process.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, in *Cloud Atlas* the protagonists' agency derails homogenous empty time and performs a rupture in the continuum of history. It becomes an instance of Benjamin's *jetzt-zeit*, "now-time," or Messianic time, which is a location of historical agency.<sup>26</sup> Messianic time explodes the binary between linear and cyclical time, allowing one to realize possibilities neglected in the past by a radical disruption through which "the continuity of the future times with the past victories of oppressors can be broken."<sup>27</sup> The rupture of *jetzt-zeit* indicates "an emergence of novelty in history. It replaces the new as return of the same in capitalism with a sense of radical newness."<sup>28</sup> Each end becomes a new beginning in the eternal recurrence, and endings hold the potential for renewal.

Contingency is symbolized in the film by the aforementioned metaphor of the door. The symbolism of the door, added by the directors and absent from the book, is a very significant motif in Wachowski's oeuvre, especially in the Matrix trilogy (1999-2003) where the door always

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<sup>24</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ed. Adrian del Caro and Robert Pippin (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 212.

<sup>25</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 2011) 331.

<sup>26</sup> Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" 261.

<sup>27</sup> Firth, Robinson, "For the Past yet to Come" 10.

<sup>28</sup> Firth, Robinson, "For the Past yet to Come" 9.

means a forking path, a choice, gaining new knowledge or even enlightenment. As in the Matrix trilogy, *Cloud Atlas* reflects on the opposition between free will and fate, and the potentialities that the moment of choice generates. The film proffers the provisional and contingent constitution of reality and personal history, enabled by the laws of quantum mechanics:

Belief, like fear or love, is a force to be understood as we understand the theory of relativity and principals of uncertainty. Phenomena that determine the course of our lives. Yesterday, my life was headed in one direction. Today, it is headed in another. Yesterday, I believe I would never have done what I did today. These forces that often remake time and space, that can shape and alter who we imagine ourselves to be, begin long before we are born and continue after we perish. Our lives and our choices, like quantum trajectories, are understood moment to moment. That each point of intersection, each encounter, suggest a new potential direction.<sup>29</sup>

In this way the film gestures at quantum physics' theory that on the atomic level the future is indeterminate and there are only probabilities; therefore our worldline is not teleologically drawn and hence it is subject to reconfiguration. Contingency holds together the film's juggled time frames, yet their arrangement is also a manifestation of the new physics' – and polychronic film's – abandonment of the distinction between past, present and future as the plot jumps forward and backward in time, short-circuiting the narrative layers. If the birthmark marks the changing bodies that the same consciousness inhabits through time, the same actors playing various parts gesture at contingency, the potentialities (from good to evil) encoded in human nature.

### **Digital Time**

The multi-layered structure of *Cloud Atlas* implicitly mirrors and responds to the alteration in the perception of time and human relationship to it in the digital age when time is

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<sup>29</sup> Tykwer, the Wachowskis, dir., *Cloud Atlas*.

characterized by instantaneity, simultaneity, fragmentation and acceleration. Carmen Leccardi describes time acceleration as “the temporal compression of our daily actions. ... the process according to which the quantity of actions contained in a lapse of time tends to increase,”<sup>30</sup> the consequence of which is the collapse of linear temporality and its replacement by a synchronicity of multi-directional activities. Our temporal experience is shattered into short segments, which are disconnected from one another and create a permanent present. The internet and technology allow us to select the time of work and interaction in a globalized world of fluid boundaries between nations, time zones and space divisions. As Nicholas Carr notes, the internet is re-wiring our brains and this stimulates a significant change in the way we read, form memories, communicate and socialize.<sup>31</sup> Stretched and simultaneously compressed time, loaded with an excess of events, engenders a deficiency in attention span and superficiality of engagement and understanding. Robert Hassan has called this type of temporality “cyber-time” or “network time,”<sup>32</sup> while Stewart has referred to it as “digitime.”<sup>33</sup>

*Cloud Atlas* illustrates the dynamics and acceleration of experiential time in the twenty-first century by its narrative framework: the fragmentation of the narrative, quick pace of events, abrupt switches from one story to another, simultaneous engagement in six stories and the immersion in the eternal present. The “network time” of an eternal present is evoked by parallel editing which creates an impression that the six stories take place simultaneously and allows the viewer to consider the film as a series of presents. The incessant criss-crossing among the temporal planes results in temporal loops, while the eternal return destabilizes the cause-effect relationships and the differentiation between past, present and future. This agrees with

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<sup>30</sup> Carmen Leccardi, “New Temporal Perspectives in the ‘High-Speed Society’,” *24/7: Time and Temporality in the Network Society*, eds., Robert Hassan, Ronald E. Purser (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007) 27.

<sup>31</sup> See Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows* (Atlantic Books Ltd, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> Robert Hassan, “Network Time,” *24/7*, eds., Hassan, Purser, 37-61.

<sup>33</sup> Stewart, *Framed Time* 8.

Deleuze's theory of time, according to which time is not a linear succession of instants but a synchronicity of different sheets of time.<sup>34</sup> Every present is linked by a vertical line with its own past and the pasts of other presents, which together constitute a single coexistence.<sup>35</sup> Time therefore takes the shape of a rhizome, a web of bifurcations, encompassing every possibility.<sup>36</sup> Deleuze insists that repetition depends on coexistence, rather than succession. In his understanding, repetition is multidirectional, and the repetitions are not directed at any final object or goal.<sup>37</sup> Nietzsche also writes about coexisting temporal planes: "It would be necessary for the whole to dissolve into an infinite number of perfectly identical existential rings and spheres, and we would therefore behold innumerable and perfectly identical worlds COEXISTING alongside each other. Is it necessary for me to admit this? Is it necessary to posit an eternal coexistence on top of the eternal succession of identical worlds."<sup>38</sup>

The *syuzhet* of the film mimics the co-temporality of the Internet. The six windows of the film are, as it were, open simultaneously to facilitate multi-tasking, similarly to Mike Figgis' *Timecode* (2000). In *Timecode* the screen is split into four sections which present four uninterrupted time-streams and allow the viewer to decide which storyline s/he will follow at a given moment. Both *Timecode* and *Cloud Atlas* are examples of what Alissa Quart has named "hyperlink cinema" to describe films in which multiple stories are interwoven in a film, forcing the viewer to mentally leap within one story and between stories in the manner they do when surfing the internet.<sup>39</sup> Figgis maintains that the viewers have been trained to watch such films

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<sup>34</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. H. Tomlison (New York: Zone, 1990) 59.

<sup>35</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (London: The Athlone Press, 1989) 91.

<sup>36</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 49.

<sup>37</sup> Adrian Parr, "Repetition," *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed., Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) 224-25.

<sup>38</sup> Nietzsche after Paul D'Iorio in D'Iorio's own translation, "The Eternal Return: Genesis and Interpretation," *The Agonist: A Nietzsche Circle Journal*, 4.1 (2011): 2.

<sup>39</sup> See Alissa Quart, "Networked," *Film Comment*, 41.4 (2005): 48-51.

since the everyday “diet of channel-surfing and multi-media has made sophisticates of modern filmgoers, equipping them to process a bombardment of information thrown at them at various frequencies.”<sup>40</sup> The structure of *Cloud Atlas* and *Timecode* ensues from the experience of time in the twenty-first century. The “acceleration in the pace of films” is the result of the acceleration of life,<sup>41</sup> James Gleick has observed, which is evident in the atemporal mode of cinema which combines the dynamic movement of movement-image with a polyphony of time frames pitted against each other and depositing various scales of time. By layering the multiple temporalities of mythical time, evolution, physics, history and the digital era, and creating the interconnected characters, *Cloud Atlas* taps into the theme of global interconnectedness and co-temporality brought about by the media and globalization. It depicts synchronicity and the entanglement of people and places; of nomads travelling through incompatible presents of various time zones. This is alluded to already in the title sequence of the film: the title appears against the background of a map of the world, then clouds appear and then the ocean follows – the globe, connectedness and time are thus signifiers following quickly one after another to foreshadow the themes of the film.

The concept of subjectivity applicable to the digital era proposed here is the networked subjectivity that is both singular and multiple, disjoined and connected concurrently. The film employs several spatial metaphors that symbolize this networked subjectivity and translate the film’s temporal relations into visual form. Apart from the metaphor of the door, the consciousness morphing from one state into another is symbolized by the titular atlas of clouds which shift in the kaleidoscope of eternal recurrence, reappearing and transmuting. Another metaphor for interconnectedness is the ocean; human life is figured as “one drop in a limitless ocean.” Ewing perceives in this image the power of being a part of the whole, rather than the solitary

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<sup>40</sup> “Film of the Month: Timecode (2000),” *Sight & Sound*, September 2000 <<http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/review/560>>.

<sup>41</sup> James Gleick, *Faster. An Acceleration of Just about Everything* (Pantheon Books, 1999) 9.

separateness and inconsequence: “What is any ocean but a multitude of drops?”<sup>42</sup> The characters constitute parts of a bigger whole in an interconnected network, and their actions and their consequences ripple through time. Their impact on others is summarized in Sonmi’s words: “The nature of our immortal lives is in the consequences of our words and deeds, that go on and are pushing themselves throughout all time. Our lives are not our own, from womb to tomb, we are bound to others, past and present, and by each crime and every kindness, we birth our future.”<sup>43</sup> The recurring images of ships and water additionally foreground the volatility of boundaries, interrelatedness, plasticity of time and subjectivity in the process of becoming-other. Water flows between the stories to denote the malleability of time and elasticity of the shifts between the selves: the Pacific, the river into which Luisa is forced, the deluge of a channel through which Sonmi and Chang escape, the flood of Neo-Seul. The sea/ocean denotes rebirth, the collective unconscious, the state between possibility and actuality, and transitional states, the changeability of shape and constant flux.<sup>44</sup> It is a symbol of time and eternity, embracing all time continuums, “the conceptual source of time itself.”<sup>45</sup>

Digital temporality and global connectedness are also symbolized by the metaphor of plates, stressed in the film and turned into a spectacle. A dream sequence in which Frobisher and Sixsmith joyously break stacks of plates in slow motion features at the beginning of Frobisher’s story in the novel. The directors position the scene centrally in the film, making the plates take over the function of the image of clouds. Disrupting the order of dishes on the piles and breaking them into small fragments reflects what Tykwer and the Wachowskis have done to Mitchell’s layer cake of a novel – they have disordered the narrative temporal plates and broken

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<sup>42</sup> Tykwer, the Wachowskis, dir., *Cloud Atlas*.

<sup>43</sup> Tykwer, the Wachowskis, dir., *Cloud Atlas*.

<sup>44</sup> Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli* 230-32.

<sup>45</sup> Jay Griffiths, *Pip Pip. A Sideways Look at Time* (London: Flamingo, 1999) 9.

them into fragments, too. Mitchell describes the structure of the film as “a sort of pointillist mosaic: We stay in each of the six worlds just long enough for the hook to be sunk in, and from then on the film darts from world to world at the speed of a plate-spinner, revisiting each narrative for long enough to propel it forward.”<sup>46</sup> The plates symbolize the simultaneity of various temporal slices in the film but also the holism of subjectivity – the characters with the birthmark are parts of the whole in the same way as fragments are parts of a plate. Additionally, the image of plates frozen in the air resembles the image of the wall of bullets stopped by Neo in *The Matrix* and *Matrix Reloaded*, and the image of magnified raindrops in *Matrix Revolutions* (2003). These images reflect extreme transformations of stretched and slowed-down time in bullet time and illustrate the spatialization of time resulting from the digital revolution (fig. 1 and 2). They are like moments of time hanging in the air, arrested in their motion and ready to be rearranged, shifted about and manipulated by a computer. They symbolize the synchronicity of temporal segments in a permanent present, or, in the words of Bauman, “The insubstantial, instantaneous time of the software world.”<sup>47</sup>



Fig. 1 and 2. Spatialization of time symbolized by the bullets in *The Matrix* and the plates in *Cloud Atlas*. © Universal Pictures.

<sup>46</sup> David Mitchell, “Translating ‘Cloud Atlas’ into the Language of Film,” *Wall Street Journal*, 19 October 2012, <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB1000087239639044367540457806087011158076>>.

<sup>47</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *The Liquid Modernity*, Malden, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012, 118.



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# NARRATIVE IS NOT IN US; BUT IT IS WE WHO MOVE IN A BEING-NARRATIVE, A WORLD NARRATIVE<sup>1</sup>

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With extravagantly red-dyed hair and a trashy, punkish look, the title character (Franka Potente) of *Run Lola Run* runs through the streets of post-wall Berlin to the persistent beat of a conspicuous techno-score.<sup>2</sup> The film not only serves as a textbook example of the ‘forking-path’ narrative, it has also frequently been used to rehearse the claim that contemporary ‘complex narratives’ adhere to an underlying classical linear logic.<sup>3</sup> This essay counters such a view on contemporary cinema and attributes instead the linearity discovered by these scholars to the narratological framework they apply. The second part of this essay explores the advantages of adding to our conceptual toolbox a film-philosophical and narratological tool, the ‘embodied’ *fabula*, designed to comprehend cinematic narration from the perspective of the *actual* experience, rather than from the causal-linear reconstruction of its narrative events.

The title of this essay is an attempt to encapsulate the governing principle behind this proposed embodied reconceptualization of the *fabula*. In *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Gilles Deleuze argues that memory has found its proper expression in the time-image.<sup>4</sup> In line with contemporary ‘embodied’ memory research,<sup>5</sup> Deleuze claims that memories are not stored in our brain, but perform an active structuring of our perception. According to him, cinematic time-images allow us to glimpse the workings of our Bergsonian memory as blending with perceptions, emotions, affects, and cognitions. In this fashion, memories are not located inside our heads, but enact and shape our immediate environment and sense of time.<sup>6</sup> Deleuze expresses this when he poetically writes: “Memory is not in us, it is we who move in a Being-memory, a world-memory”.<sup>7</sup> My thesis is that something similar is at stake in contemporary ‘puzzle films’, ‘mind-game’ movies, ‘neuro-

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<sup>1</sup> The research for this essay has been conducted as part of my doctoral dissertation, *Embodying the Fabula: Cinema between the Lines*, at Bauhaus-Universität Weimar in Germany and supported by a scholarship from the *Graduiertenförderung des Freistaates Thüringen*.

<sup>2</sup> *Run Lola Run* [*Lola rennt*]. Dir. Tom Tykwer. Perf. Franka Potente, Moritz Bleibtreu, Herbert Knaup and Nina Petri. Sony Pictures Classics, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> See David Bordwell, “Film Futures,” *Substance* 31.1 (2002): 88-104. In this article, Bordwell uses the term ‘forking path’ narratives – named after Jorge Luis Borges’ short story “The Garden of Forking Paths” – to describe a series of narratives in which the linear unfolding of the story bifurcates to reveal the mutually incompatible forks to occur from a similar vantage point. Besides *Run Lola Run*, Bordwell also refers to *Blind Chance* ([*Przypadek*] Kieślowski, 1987), *Groundhog Day* (Ramis, 1993), and *Sliding Doors* (Howitt, 1998) as examples of the ‘forking path’ narrative.

<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Continuum, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> See for instance Rolf Pfeifer and Josh Bongard, *How the Body Shapes the Way We Think*, (Cambridge; London: MIT Press, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Hence, ‘episodic memory’ is commonly referred to as ‘mental time travel’, see Endel Tulving, “Episodic and Semantic Memory,” *Organization of Memory*, ed. Endel Tulving and Wayne Donaldson (New York: Academic Press, 1972): 381-403.

<sup>7</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Continuum, 2005) 95.

images', or 'complex narratives'.<sup>8</sup> Yet, while memory remains a vital theme in these films, I propose to look elsewhere: namely, to how these films allow the spectators to *embody* their narrative universes. In reference to *Run Lola Run*, this aspect of contemporary cinema can be expressed by rewriting the Deleuzian phrase on the time-image. Hence, contemporary 'complex narratives' render visible how 'narrative is not in us, but it is we who move in a Being-narrative, a world-narrative'.

### 1. *Run Lola Run*: Classical Narratology and Complex Storytelling

In Jorge Luis Borges' short story "The Garden of Forking Paths", the mysterious figure Ts'ui Pên has created a labyrinth of time rather than space. Instead of limiting our choice to one of several options, this labyrinth opens up all the possible, yet mutually exclusive, paths of action.<sup>9</sup> *Run Lola Run* is an example of how Ts'ui Pên's labyrinth has materialized in cinema on its own rights. In the film, Lola is running to save the life of her boyfriend Manni (Moritz Bleibtreu) – a foolish antihero, who lost possession of a bag containing 100.000 DM that he was supposed to deliver to his merciless gangster boss. Passive and incapable of even the simplest tasks, Manni is contrasted to Lola, who literally and visually sets things in motion as she is desperately trying to get hold of the money within a 20-minute deadline. However, each run ends with a sudden resetting of the original scenario, thereby granting Lola the opportunity to perform the run anew and thus visualizing another of the Borgesian forking paths. The film presents three different 'runs' of which only the third and final presents a happy outcome for the couple.

*Run Lola Run* has not only been the subject of explorations into its national, historical, and philosophical themes, but has also become an example of how the 'complexity' of

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<sup>8</sup> For different perspectives on contemporary 'complex' storytelling, see Jan Simons, "Complex narratives," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 6.2 (2008): 111-126; Patricia Pisters, *The Neuro-Image: A Deleuzian Film-Philosophy of the Digital Screen Culture* (Stanford UP, 2012); Warren Buckland, ed., *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema* (Malden, MA: Blackwell-Wiley, 2009); Thomas Elsaesser "Mind-Game Movies," *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*, ed. Warren Buckland (Malden, MA: Blackwell-Wiley, 2009) 13-41.

<sup>9</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "The Garden of Forking Paths," *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, trans. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (London: Penguin Books, 2000) 5.

contemporary cinema “emphasizes the complex telling (plot, narration) of a simple or complex story (narrative)”<sup>10</sup>. Based on the classical narratological distinction between the *fabula* (~ story) and the *syuzhet* (~ plot), this supports the widespread claim that an innovative form is often compensated with simplicity at the level of the story. David Bordwell, for instance, maintains that *Run Lola Run*, “which is very experimental in some ways, is in many ways also very traditional. Beginning-middle-end, she gets three chances, the last one is the right one [...] I mean this is very much in the spirit of classical cinema”<sup>11</sup>. According to Bordwell’s cognitive-formalist take on the film, *Run Lola Run* becomes a prime example of how the forking paths of cinema have been “trimmed back to cognitively manageable dimensions [...] designed for quick comprehension”<sup>12</sup>.

A similar line of reasoning can be found in film-philosophical writings on *Run Lola Run*. In examining how in a series of ‘hybrid films’ the movement-image and time-image “interact as a mutual struggle of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation”, David Martin-Jones contends that despite *Run Lola Run*’s apparent use of deterministic chaos, it restrains the labyrinthine possibilities residing in this model to the classical linear view of time.<sup>13</sup> Martin-Jones operates with an opposition between classical linear (associated with the movement-image) and nonlinear (associated with the time-image) qualities. This binary logic underpins the author’s categorization of the inherent temporal quality of various forms of contemporary ‘hybrid films’. According to this logic, “whether an image is a movement- or a time-image depends on the degree to which it de- or reterritorialises time. The closer it is to establishing a linear narrative, the

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<sup>10</sup> Warren Buckland, “Introduction”, *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema* (Malden, MA: Blackwell-Wiley, 2009) 6.

<sup>11</sup> David Bordwell quoted in Simone Donecker, *Narrative Constructions in Tom Tykwer’s Run, Lola, Run* (München: GRIN Verlag, 2005) 1.

<sup>12</sup> David Bordwell, “Film Futures,” *Substance* 31.1 (2002): 91.

<sup>13</sup> David Martin-Jones, *Deleuze, Cinema, and National Identity: Narrative Time in National Contexts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2006) 112.

more likely it is to be a movement-image. By contrast, the more visible the labyrinth, the closer to the time-image”<sup>14</sup>.

Insofar as this categorical evaluation of the underlying temporal logic accounts for neither the spectators’ corporal, affective, nor their emotional investments in the films, it shares Bordwell’s cognitive-formalist assumption that a “spectator’s comprehension of the films’ narrative is theoretically separable from his or her emotional responses”<sup>15</sup>. Martin-Jones explicitly draws on Bordwell, whose treatment of *Run Lola Run*, he believes, can be translated into Deleuzian terms as “observing how classical narrative devices are used to order the multiple narratives of [forking-path] films into the coherent, linear schema we expect of a movement-image. Thus, their labyrinthine visions of time are mapped in a user-friendly way, once reterritorialised within the parameters of the movement-image”<sup>16</sup>. In this sense, Martin-Jones’ treatment of *Run Lola Run* is representative of a tendency to pursue classical narratological questions by categorizing films according to the Deleuzian regimes of movement-images and time-images.

Although the *fabula* can be a useful narratological tool, this essay aims to explore its limitations once confronted with cinematic complexity. The major problem in this respect pertains to how the *fabula* introduces a series of classical scientific principles for the reduction of complexity. These principles – as traced out by Edgar Morin – are 1) the principle of universal determinism associated with Laplace; 2) the principle of reduction, which “consists in knowing any composite from only the knowledge of its basic constituting elements”; and finally 3) the principle of disjunction, which “consists in isolating and separating cognitive difficulties from one

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 27.

<sup>15</sup> David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (U of Wisconsin P, 1985) 30.

<sup>16</sup> David Martin-Jones, *Deleuze, Cinema, and National Identity: Narrative Time in National Contexts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2006) 87.



another”.<sup>17</sup> According to Morin, these principles have led to important and brilliant advancements up until a point, “where the limits of intelligibility which they constituted became more important than their elucidations”<sup>18</sup>. In the following, I argue that ‘complex narratives’ such as *Run Lola Run* make a similar statement possible concerning the *fabula* as a classical narratological tool for reducing narrative complexity.

In its cognitive-formalist reinvigoration, the *fabula-syuzhet*-distinction is based on the assumption that cinematic spectatorship involves a series of culturally variable cogitators, who ‘model’ or construct an independently existing reality that is not immediately given, but must be inferred by means of (universal) reasoning. In this model, narrative ‘complexity’ becomes merely an expression of “the difficulty of giving a definition or explanation” and as such, “complexity relates only to appearances that are superficial or illusory”<sup>19</sup>. In addition, this view structures our perception of the narrative environment in a particular manner insofar as the spectator’s perception is attuned to the construction of a coherent and unified story.<sup>20</sup>

Despite its constructivist tenets, it can be argued that the *fabula*, as it has been revitalized by cognitive-formalism, presupposes an observer-independent narrative reality for the analyst to discover. As Bordwell declares, his version of constructivism “assumes that it is possible to arrive at inferences which are at least approximately true; it is thus compatible with a critical realist epistemology”.<sup>21</sup> Tim Ingold has criticized a similar perceptual relativist position within anthropology. Like cognitive-formalism, this stance contends that people from different cultural

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<sup>17</sup> Edgar Morin, “Restricted Complexity, General Complexity,” *Worldviews, Science, and Us: Philosophy and Complexity* (River Edge, NJ: World Scientific Pub Co Inc, 2007) 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 6.

<sup>20</sup> See David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (U of Wisconsin P, 1985) 33.

<sup>21</sup> David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991) 277.

backgrounds perceive reality in different ways since they process the same data of experience in terms of alternative frameworks of belief or representational schemata. According to Ingold, this position does not undermine but actually reinforce the claim of natural science to deliver an authoritative account of how nature really works.<sup>22</sup>

In effect, such a view introduces a temporal disengagement between the organizing subject (spectator/analyst) and the world (film/narrative) whose temporal units can be ordered (*fabula*). In line with this disengagement, the mission of the analyst becomes to “search, behind those appearances, the hidden order that is the authentic reality of the universe”<sup>23</sup>. Eventually this leads to a further temporal disengagement, this time between the analyst and the spectator. The former observes the narrative from a point of view that comes after the actual experience (i.e., from the perspective of the analytically constructed *fabula*). The analyst thus becomes detached from the actual cinematic spectator, who in constructing the *fabula* is prone to commit to “stereotypes, faulty inferences, and erroneous conclusions” that “play a central role in narrative comprehension”<sup>24</sup>. In drawing explicitly or implicitly upon the concept of the *fabula*, Bordwell and Martin-Jones evaluate the temporal nature of *Run Lola Run* from an analytically detached perspective dominated by backward reasoning.

To the extent that it makes the film’s narrative appear deterministically constructed, this method introduces Morin’s first principle for the reduction of complexity. Insofar as the analysts from a detached temporal point of view know how the story ended, they are likely to interpret all narrative events in terms of their necessity (these events had to be like this otherwise the *fabula* would be different). Lola’s third run is thus interpreted as ‘successful’ only from a detached

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<sup>22</sup> Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) 15.

<sup>23</sup> Edgar Morin, “Restricted Complexity, General Complexity,” *Worldviews, Science, and Us: Philosophy and Complexity* (River Edge, NJ: World Scientific Pub Co Inc, 2007) 6.

<sup>24</sup> David Bordwell, “Film Futures,” *Substance* 31.1 (2002): 90.

perspective that devaluates the two first runs from a deterministic point of view. Bordwell and Martin-Jones determine the underlying linear logic of *Run Lola Run* from the temporally detached point of the last run. Only from this perspective can the former two runs be deemed 'less real'.

In addition, both assume the film to adhere to merely one temporal logic, which can be fitted into binary schemes such as 'linear versus nonlinear' or 'movement-image versus time-image'. This is problematic for (at least) two reasons. First, Steven Shaviro has convincingly argued that these classical oppositions have ceased to be imperative in what he terms 'post-cinema'.<sup>25</sup> Second, because this evaluation is conducted from the perspective of a narratological tool that is detached from the actual (cognitive, emotional, affective, and temporal) experience of the film, thereby using a method that is not sensitive towards 'nonlinear' dimensions of cinema.

In relation to the first problem with the 'linear-nonlinear' opposition, Slavoj Žižek encourages a reversal of the narratological commonsense, which holds that the style of *Run Lola Run* has been appropriated to its narrative. According to Žižek, "it is not that *Lola's* formal properties adequately express the narrative; it is rather that the film's narrative itself was invented in order to be able to practise the style"<sup>26</sup>. Accordingly, *Run Lola Run* does not owe its commercial success to a reterritorialised representation of chaos within classical parameters (such as Bordwell and Martin-Jones suggest). Instead, the film has successfully appropriated a narrative form that complements what Žižek calls "a perception of life that explodes the form of the linear, centred narrative and renders life as a multiform flow"<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, the desire to determine the true underlying logic expressed in the fast-motion sequences, musical editing,

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<sup>25</sup> See Steven Shaviro, "Post-Cinematic Affect: On Grace Jones, Boarding Gate and Southland Tales," *Film-Philosophy* 14.1 (2010): 1-102.

<sup>26</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Friction of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski between Theory and Post-Theory* (London: BFI Pub, 2001) 81.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 78.

frozen still images, slow and fast motion, grainy images, and above all in the iconic protagonist can no longer capture the film's distinct cinematic rhythms.

The second problem with fitting the film into a 'linear-nonlinear' scheme is that the *fabula* as a narratological tool is incapable of capturing the nonlinear dimension of cinema. The *fabula* structures the analytical task around a 'straightening out' of the narrative continuum in a manner that isolates our cognitive from our affective and emotional experiences. From this detached perspective, Bordwell and Martin-Jones fail to take properly into account how the synesthetic audiovisual nature of *Run Lola Run* shapes its temporal and narrative rhythms. According to Shaviro, cinema contains virtual images that "do not correspond to anything actually present, but as images, or as sensations, they affect me in a manner that does not leave room for any suspension of my response. I have already been touched and altered by these sensations, even before I have had the chance to become conscious of them"<sup>28</sup>. However, since the *fabula* is cognitively constructed in a manner that is not only temporally detached from the actual cinematic experience, but also isolated from our affective and emotional responses to the film, it is ill-adapted for comprehending this 'virtual' dimension of cinema.

In its cognitive-formalist expression, the *fabula* is upheld by the assumption that cognitive phenomena can be accounted for locally. According to Susan Hurley, this position within cognitive science can be described by the metaphor of the 'classical sandwich of action, cognition, and perception'.<sup>29</sup> Here cognition is given a privileged position as the sandwich filling that mediates between, though remaining unaffected by, perceptual inputs and motor actions. This view can be related to Morin's two principles of reduction and disjunction.

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<sup>28</sup> Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 1993) 45.

<sup>29</sup> See Susan Hurley, *Consciousness in Action*, 1st edition, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002).

The ‘classical sandwich’ can also be detected in the cognitive-formalist concept of the *fabula* perceived as an internal representation of the story constructed by our cognitive-perceptual system via inferences, hypothesis testing, schemata application, etc. As such, the *fabula* is the product of cognitive computations and inferences collected from the film’s ‘inputs’ (the ‘cues’) as well as the source of our ‘outputs’ (visceral or emotional reactions) to the film.

Such a view has been countered by what has become known as ‘embodied cognition’. Alva Noë, who promotes an embodied take on perception, argues that perception is not “a process in the brain, but a skillful activity on the part of the animal as a whole”<sup>30</sup>. The same, I would argue, could be said about narrative comprehension. Thus, in rejecting the clear separation between perception (input), cognition (information processing), and action (output), which is not only constitutive of the classical cognitive stance but also underpins the concept of the *fabula* as a model for narrative comprehension, ‘embodied cognition’ presents a serious challenge to classical narratology.

According to Antonio Damasio, the basic philosophical principle of classical cognitive science is the Cartesian dictum *cogito ergo sum*.<sup>31</sup> The neuroscientist has famously disputed this dictum as a model for understanding the origins of the mind and the relation between mind and body. Damasio’s research on emotions strongly indicates that the body and brain cannot be separated in the fashion implied by the ‘classical sandwich’. Although his position does not amount to a plain rejection of the cognitive-formalist assumption that our emotional responses to films depend on how we evaluate and assimilate information cognitively,<sup>32</sup> it does invite us to think the relation between affect, emotion, and cognition in more interactive and dynamic terms.

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<sup>30</sup> Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004) 2.

<sup>31</sup> See Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995).

<sup>32</sup> Carl Plantinga, “Cognitive Film Theory: An Insider’s Appraisal,” *Cinémas revue D’études cinématographiques/Cinémas Journal of Film Studies* 12.2 (2002): 24.

## 2. Embodying the *Fabula*

As an alternative to the cognitive-formalist *fabula*, I propose the concept of the ‘embodied’ *fabula*. This concept is theoretically informed by phenomenological and film-philosophical studies that aim to reinvigorate the role of the body in cinema.<sup>33</sup> It is furthermore consistent with the research undertaken within ‘embodied’ cognitive neuroscience.<sup>34</sup> In the following, I explore how the concept of the ‘embodied’ *fabula* can be used to open up the temporal and narrative rhythms of *Run Lola Run*.

Unlike its classical narratological and cognitive-formalist counterpart, the ‘embodied’ *fabula* does not prioritize the search for an underlying, coherent, meaningful, and chronological story beyond the ‘complex’, entangled, or complicated plot. It approaches the cinematic experience from an examination of how pre-cognitive, visceral, and affective processes engage in complex, mutual interactions with cognitive and emotional responses to film. The ‘embodied’ reconceptualization of the *fabula* thereby challenges the idea of narrative comprehension as an exclusively cognitive domain that can be described in reference to ‘problem-solution’ models. Once the cinematic continuum is no longer primarily to be understood as a causal-linear series of events, cinema’s ability to absorb the viewer into its temporalities, narrative rhythms, and sensational flows becomes apparent. In rendering these processes visible, the ‘embodied’ *fabula* contributes to a richer comprehension of the temporal architecture of cinema and its unique mode

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<sup>33</sup> See Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thought: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: U of California P, 2004); Jennifer Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2009); Paul Elliott, *Hitchcock and the Cinema of Sensations: Embodied Film Theory and Cinematic Reception* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2010); Patricia Pisters Print, *The Neuro-Image: A Deleuzian Film-Philosophy of Digital Screen Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford U P, 2012); and Steven Shavero, *The Cinematic Body*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis; London: U of Minnesota P, 1993).

<sup>34</sup> On the subject of ‘embodiment’ within the study of cognition, (affective) neuroscience, and the philosophy of mind see Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004); Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992); Michael Wheeler, *Reconstructing the Cognitive World: The Next Step* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); Susan Hurley, *Consciousness in Action*, 1st edition, Cambridge, (MA: Harvard UP, 2002); Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2005); and Vittorio Gallese and Michele Guerra, “Embodying Movies: Embodied Simulation and Film Studies,” *Cinema: Journal of Philosophy and the Moving Image* 3 (2012): 183–210. For a recent introduction to the field see Lawrence A. Shapiro, *Embodied Cognition* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

of engaging its audience. The narratological advantage of the ‘embodied’ *fabula* is that it retains the open nature of cinematic narration. In addition, its film-philosophical approach means that cinema can be used as a site for rethinking our role in shaping experience according to our prevalent metaphors, conceptual tools, and how we ‘normally’ structure perception.

From the perspective of the ‘embodied’ *fabula*, our narrative comprehension of a film cannot be separated from our bodily responses to it. In relation to *Run Lola Run*, this means that our analytical construction of the story must be connected to those aspects that appeal more directly to our bodily sensations. Given the prominent role of music and rhythm in terms of soundtrack as well as editing, it is important to include these dimensions to our understanding of the temporality conveyed by *Run Lola Run*. In relation to this, Michel Chion has suggested that in contemporary cinema “music has become the ever more privileged ‘place’ of the film and the reference point of its editing”<sup>35</sup>. According to Chion, films that grant a prominent role to music no longer display the same necessity for allowing spectators to construct a coherent, coordinated, and homogenous visual space. Although *Run Lola Run* incorporates what could be termed a linear narrative flow, the prominent role of music ensures that this logic is accompanied by a musical, or rhythmical, narrative flow.

As Michael Wedel argues in his treatment of the film, Bordwell’s sequential reorganization of the narrative events “needs to be complemented and counterbalanced with an understanding of its overarching narrative rhythms and frequencies as equally significant levels of narration”.<sup>36</sup> In her study of the soundscape of *Run Lola Run*, Caryl Flinn suggests that the choice of techno music has – at least – two plausible motivations.<sup>37</sup> First, techno music with its

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<sup>35</sup> Michel Chion, *Film, a Sound Art* (New York: Columbia U P, 2009) 416.

<sup>36</sup> Wedel, Michael. “Backbeat and Overlap: Time, Place, and Character Subjectivity in *Run Lola Run*,” *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*, ed. Warren Buckland (Malden, MA: Blackwell-Wiley, 2009) 129.

<sup>37</sup> See Caryl Flinn, “The Music That Lola Ran to,” *Sound Matters: Essays on the Acoustics of Modern German Culture*, ed. Lutz Koepnick and Nora Alter (New York: Berghahn Press, 2004): 197–213.

persistent 'backbeat' has a direct and bodily appeal, which is underlined in its function as dance music. The music thus attaches our affective engagements with the film to the movements of the title character, and thereby constitutes a very basic and pre-cognitive bond between spectator and protagonist (that feeds back into and thus influences our cognitive appreciation of the film). It can be argued, as Bordwell has done, that this is accompanied by an epistemological bond between the spectator and Lola since both are able to 'learn' across parallel universes. In this manner, the film connects us to Lola cognitively as well as affectively.

The music, however, does not only tie spectators to the film's main character, but equally much connects them to the persistent and riveting flow of the film. As Flinn argues, it is first and foremost the musical beats of *Run Lola Run* that dictate its rhythm, pace, editing, and energetic flow. Therefore, Bordwell's and Martin-Jones' claims about the underlying linear temporality of contemporary 'complex narrations' are seriously restrained in their reliance upon a narratology that filters out such 'nonlinear' factors.

In relation to *Run Lola Run*, the musical score, for instance, has its own dramaturgy, which cannot be submerged to the narrative progress towards the 'one true path'. Flinn observes that the music of the film is not leading up to the inevitable climax of the story, since "unlike traditional tonal music, techno has no clear beginning, patterns of development, or resolution; unchanging and energetic, it is repetitive without standing still"<sup>38</sup>. Rather than simply inducing a moment of progression, the music enfolds the spectators in the rhythm of the film. This is primarily achieved at the level of affection, where the spectator is connected to the musical rhythm of the film (repetition) and to Lola's relentlessly forward moving body (linearity). At times, the rhythm of the film, the movement of the main character, and the affectedness are so enfolded in one another as to appear inseparable. The film, for instance, achieves this in a scene

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 202.



where Lola's heartbeat is in perfect synchrony with the beat of the techno music, conjoint in one united pumping rhythm.

The narrative structure, the film's multi-modal visual style, and the dynamics of the soundtrack all simultaneously complement Lola's restless forward movement and the film's repetitive loops in order to accentuate recognizable patterns of change and difference. From this perspective, *Run Lola Run* contains both continuities and discontinuities, yet can be reduced to neither the linear logic of continuity (associated with classical cinema) nor the nonlinear ruptures of discontinuity (associated with art-cinema).

From the perspective of the 'embodied' *fabula*, the film does what Marshall McLuhan argued electronic technology did more generally: it "dethrones the visual sense and restores us to the dominion of synesthesia, and the close interinvolvement of the other senses".<sup>39</sup> The 'embodied' *fabula* helps us to unite the different temporalities of the film – whether pertaining to the soundtrack, editing, visual effects, narration, or the spectator's experience – on the same conceptual plane. From this point of view, *Run Lola Run* is not an example of the reterritorialization of linear temporality, but a testimony to the complex temporality of cinematic narration once perceived from the actual cinematic experience. However, this implies that narration is not constructed by the detached, computational, and cognitive machinery of the spectator with the aim of establishing a narrative 'truth'. As T.S. Eliot once stated, the "poem's existence is somewhere between reader and writer".<sup>40</sup> *Run Lola Run* enables us to approach cinematic narration as a complex process in which spectators become cognitively, emotionally, and affectively immersed in the narrative environment unfolding before them. In this manner,

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<sup>39</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 1<sup>st</sup> MIT edition (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994) 111.

<sup>40</sup> T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England*. (Harvard UP, 1986) 21.

*Run Lola Run* demonstrates how in contemporary 'complex' cinema 'narrative is not in us, but it is we who move in a Being-narrative, a world-narrative'.

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## LYRIC TIME AND LEE CHANG-DONG'S *POETRY* (2010)

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This paper shows how the elusive problem of time may be thought through, and alongside, the phenomenology of film. While drawing from the work of Martin Heidegger and Alain Badiou, it discusses the 2010 film, *Poetry*, by the South Korean director Lee Chang-dong. *Poetry*'s main protagonist is an elderly woman named Mi-ja (played by a well-known actress that appeared in many South Korean melodramas from the 1960s) with terminal cancer. She takes care of her grandchild, a disaffected teenager who was participated in the heinous sexual assault of a female classmate. Mi-ja takes a poetry class and is assigned to write one poem by the end of the term. Concluding the film, the lyrical poem she composes is a memorial to the victimized girl. Mi-ja's words transfigure the her tragic death into a reflection upon time, the phenomenology of things, and the realization of her own being-toward-death. Through this, the poem enables ontological and ethical reflection, gathering the mortality of all worldly entities, including the characters in *Poetry*, the film medium itself, and the living spectator as co-present, moving, and finite bodies. Lee's film disturbs the fantasy of immortality imputed by the transcendental viewer, and compels self-reflection upon the ethics of seeing in the cinema. Death, understood in its existential sense, thus provides the conceptual vocabulary for theorizing time and thinking the fragile reality of all things.

In the press release materials for his feature-length film, *Poetry*, Lee Chang-dong notes in an interview that its germinating idea was inspired by a real incident that took place in Miryang in 2004. "A few years ago," he says, "there was a case whereby several teenage boys from a small rural city gang-raped a middle school girl. For quite some time, I've been thinking of this act of violence, but wasn't sure how I would tell this story on film." Lee recounts that the title came to him later while watching television in a hotel room in Tokyo: "As I watched the screen playing meditative music to the extremely typical landscape of birds flying over a peaceful river and fishermen throwing their fishnets, it hit me that this film dealing with this insidious crime could have no other title than *Poetry*." Most likely the incident Lee refers to in this interview is a nationally publicized sexual assault that took place in 2004 involving dozens of boys, an event that not only raised the issue of immorality among the youth, but also drew attention to the corruption of the local police, who tried to cover up the crimes for the sake of the

young boys' futures. While Lee was filming his previous film in Miryang, *Secret Sunshine* (2007), which deals with the kidnapping and murder of a mother's only son, it could not have escaped him that the name of this town is not only where the film is set but also where the crimes took place in 2004. This film from 2007 seems not to have directly depicted the crimes that affected the director so deeply.

In the following discussion of *Poetry*, I aim to show how this film delves into a number of themes already raised in Lee Chang-dong's earlier films, including the ethics of violence and the possibility of forgiveness. *Poetry* allows Lee, and by co-extension the viewer, to enter into relation with the 2004 Miryang tragedy, depicting it without taking recourse to the clichéd conventions of genre cinema. I would like to show how the conclusion to *Poetry* raises questions of time and reality that go beyond everyday, rational understandings of historical temporality associated with the popular melodramatic mode. These questions are inseparable from questions of ethics and the other that delineate the horizon of the lived present. Thinking at the limit, *Poetry* attempts to overcome the metaphysics that circumscribes this horizon, and transcends the politics of blame that characterize the metaphysics of everyday historical temporality, while preparing for the arrival of a time that opens up a profoundly new ethical economy altogether. If *Secret Sunshine* and *Poetry* are seen together, we can understand how Lee seems to have twice attempted to find the images that will properly depict all those involved in the 2004 tragedy, and who continued to live while the films were being made and shown.

The trajectory of *Poetry* intertwines several narrative strands, all of which are tightly wound around the main character, an elderly woman called Mija. Mija is played by legendary Korean actress Yoon Jeong-hee, who has starred in hundreds of tragic tear-jerker films from the 1960s, during the so-called golden age of South Korean melodrama. In *Poetry* she plays the guardian of her grandson, Jong-wook (David Lee), a disaffected teenager who seems more interested in watching television and sleeping in than interacting with his grandmother. The



film opens with a long take of a corpse of a teenage girl, floating on a river toward the viewer. As the body floats close to the camera, the name of the film appears, explicitly associating poetry with death. From this morbid beginning, the film shifts to Mija sitting in the waiting room of the local hospital for her regular check-up. When she sees the doctor, Mija complains of a prickly feeling in her arm and occasional lapses in memory. The doctor advises her to undergo further testing in Seoul. As she leaves the hospital, Mija encounters the ostensible mother of the drowned girl, agonizingly mourning her overwhelming loss.

Mija works as a personal assistant to an old man who is physically disabled and struggles to speak due to complication from a stroke. Later in the film, while being bathed, he asks her to sleep with him, to “make him feel like a man” one last time before his death. She rebuffs his request. Mija also begins attending an adult education class on poetry at the local community center. The charismatic teacher of the class, played by poet Kim Yong-taek, lectures on the creative muse and the comportment toward the world that inspires poetic beauty. He asks that the students complete one task by the end of the month-long course: to write one poem from the heart, one that expresses this attitude of openness.

It is in the midst of these events that Mija is notified of two tragic, watershed pieces of information. The results of her health test indicate that she has developed Alzheimer’s disease. She will eventually lose command of her memory as well as her physical mobility. Mija’s being-toward-death will generate a sense of urgency for the remainder of the film, compelling the plot’s forward drive toward its conclusion. And later in the film, even more shocking, she is informed that her grandson had participated in the repeated sexual assault of a female classmate over a six-month duration. Five other boys were involved in this heinous crime, and eventually the teenager killed herself due to shame and trauma. Mija is brought to a local restaurant where the fathers of the boys have already gathered to decide, somewhat grotesquely, the proper amount that the mother of the teenage girl should be paid so that she does not speak to the news media.

One of the men makes clear that their concern is more for the future lives and reputations of their sons, and less for the wellbeing of the girl's family or even the weight of their sons' culpability. The floating corpse introduced at the start of the film, we can now surmise, was the victim of the boys' sexual violence. Her name was Heejin, and her baptized name Agnes.

Thus Lee's film sets these plotlines into motion, and as the film unfolds the prospects of writing poetry and finding beauty in the world become increasingly remote from the prospects of having to deal with Alzheimer's and with the frustratingly apathetic and seemingly shameless Jong-wook. The group of fathers coerces Mija to convince Heejin's mother to accept their settlement offer. "Just plead with her heart-to-heart, woman-to-woman," one of the men says to her. When she arrives at the house and then the fields where the Agnes's mother is harvesting, Mija's attention is directed toward the natural beauty of her surroundings. She walks by an apricot tree and picks up a fruit that has fallen to the ground. Biting into it, Mija is suddenly struck by poetic inspiration. She quickly removes a small notebook from her purse and writes: "The apricot throws itself to the ground. It is crushed and trampled for its next life." She continues down the path and sees Heejin's mother (Park Myeong-shin). But instead of speaking to her about the grave matters Mija was sent to negotiate, they make small talk. Mija excitedly recites the poetic line she just wrote, and converse about the weather and the season's harvest. And with this they say their goodbyes. As she walks away, a look of horror forms on her face as Mija realizes the identity of the friendly woman and what she was unable to speak. It is not clear whether Mija was simply caught up in her poetic reverie and the spirit of friendly banter, or her encroaching Alzheimer's caused her to completely forget her mission. Throughout Lee's *Poetry*, an ontological separation persists between her pursuit of poetry and the business of her grandson's guilt.

According to the poetry teacher, writing a poem is about perceiving life's beauty, like the transient beauty of a fallen apricot. Yet this directive to see only beauty seems to have foreclosed

her capacity to see the ugliness and cruelty that is also a part of her reality. “Writing poetry is all about finding beauty,” the poet tells his students, “It is about discovering true beauty in everything we see in front of us in our everyday life.” He tells them that everyone has poetry in their hearts and that their task is to release this potential. Mija raises her hand and asks where poetic inspiration may be found. “It’s not in some special place,” he responds, “but somewhere you must wander around for. It isn’t waiting for you with a nameplate saying ‘poetic inspiration.’ The clear thing is, it is somewhere nearby, not far away. It’s there, right where you stand.” This vocabulary of proximity resembles that of Martin Heidegger’s when he describes *Dasein* as ontically or metaphysically nearest yet ontologically furthest from us. In his essay on “The Thing,” the German philosopher even speaks of proximity in the age of cinema: “What is least remote from us in point of distance, by virtue of its picture on film or its sound on the radio, can remain far from us. What is incalculably far from us in point of distance can be near to us. Short distance is not in itself nearness. Nor is great distance remoteness.”<sup>1</sup> It is the poet’s task to find a language that properly captures the sense of Being that is nearest to human life. The search for poetic beauty, which for Mija seems so far away and remote, seems to have foreclosed the possibility of perceiving the cruelty that is immanent to her present reality.

In another lesson, the poet emphasizes learning how to see the world with an unmediated look, reminding one perhaps of a goal shared by the phenomenological project. “To write poetry, you must see well,” he remarks, “the most important thing in life is seeing.” Holding an apple in his hand, he asks the students whether they have really seen an apple:

Up till now, you haven’t seen an apple for real. To really know what an apple is, to be interested in it, to understand it, to converse with it is really seeing it. Gazing at it for a while and observing its shadow, feeling its every curve, turning it around, taking a bite out of it, imagining the sunlight absorbed in it – that is really seeing

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Thing,” *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper, 1975) 165.

it. If you can really see something, you can feel something naturally, like water gathering in a spring.

He then remarks that this comportment toward the object is preparation for writing poetry. “You should prepare paper and a pencil, and wait for the moment to come. Empty white paper. A world of pure potential, a world before creation: this is the perfect moment for a poet.” The instructor encourages his students to access the phenomenon of worldly objects in a manner that is unimpeded by the distractions associated with modern life, to see an apple once more as if for the first time. If poetry is to fulfill its promise, it is to allow its readers and listeners to experience the pure perception of a thing and its reality.

Lee Chang-dong’s previous films, like *A Single Spark* (1995), *Green Fish* (1997), and *Peppermint Candy* (1999) have character-driven plots, and as such participate in what film scholar Linda Williams called the “melodramatic mode.”<sup>2</sup> They involve characters that act and react rationally to their surroundings, as their actions guide the judgmental look of the film spectator through a Manichean dichotomy between good and evil operative in its diegetic world. The significance of meaningful action, expressive of interiorities that may be moralized, is reinforced through the film’s editing, which confirms to the necessary and linear linkage of cause to effect that ostensibly conditions our modern reality. Even in scenes where Lee depicts moments of fantasy, such as in the daydream sequence in *Oasis*, the lighting remains natural and the settings adhere to the rhetoric of realism.

All this holds for the majority of *Poetry* as well. Lonng takes, on-location shooting, and seemingly mundane dialogue dominate *Poetry*, sustaining a mood of everydayness throughout the film. But this mood is broken when it reaches its sublime conclusion. Mija paid her part of the settlement to the mother of the teenage victim, but instead of celebrating with the other

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<sup>2</sup> See Linda Williams, “Melodrama Revised,” *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 42-88.

parents, she takes Jong-wook home, cuts his fingernails, has him bathe, and finally allows him to be picked up by the police. As soon as he is taken away, Mija sits down in her small kitchen and begins to write. This is the last time we will see her in the film. The next day, her poem is left on the poetry instructor's lectern with a bouquet of flowers. He remarks that he will recite Mija's poem, which is called, "Agnes's Song." The film then cuts to a montage of images: a shot of Jong-wook's mother coming to visit Mija's empty apartment, the tree that Mija contemplated while waiting for poetic inspiration to arrive, children playing with hula hoops, a bus departing from a bus stop, a girl walking across a school playground, the science classroom where the atrocious crimes took place, Agnes's house in the country with a close-up on the dog happily jumping up to the camera, a shot taken from inside a moving bus, and the bridge from where Agnes jumped to her death. Over these shots, Mija's voice reads her elegiac poem in voiceover. It is written by Lee himself (the English translation is derived from the subtitles to the United Entertainment Korea DVD):

How is it over there?

How lonely is it?

Is it still glowing red at sunset?

Are the birds still singing on the way to the forest?

Can you receive the letter I dared not send?

Can I convey...

the confession I dared not make?

Will time pass and roses fade?

Now it's time to say goodbye

Like the wind that lingers and then goes,

just like shadows

To promises that never came,

to the love sealed till the end.

With the next line, the film cuts to the school playground, and Mija's gentle voice is overtaken by that of a young girl's, presumably Agnes, who continues reading the lyric poem until the end.

To the grass kissing my weary ankles

And to the tiny footsteps following me

It's time to say goodbye

Now as darkness falls

Will a candle be lit again?

Here I pray...

nobody shall cry...

and for you to know...

how deeply I loved you

The long wait in the middle of a hot summer day

An old path resembling my father's face

Even the lonesome wild flower shyly turning away

How deeply I loved

How my heart fluttered at hearing your faint song

When Agnes speaks the next line, the film cuts to the bridge where she committed suicide. A truck passes by while sounding its horn.

I bless you

Before crossing the black river

With my soul's last breath

I am beginning to dream...

a bright sunny morning...

again I awake blinded by the light...

and meet you...

standing by me.

A plaintive song, the poem both laments and commemorates loss, seeks redemption from guilt, and meditates on the passing of time. As the words end, the camera moves toward the side of the bridge and as it comes closer to the railing, a teenage Agnes enters the frame. She turns around to meet the gaze of the camera and smiles slightly, arresting the viewer with her peaceful look. In an interview, Lee states that, "I wanted the audience to face her directly at the end of the film. I wanted people to remember her faintly smiling face and expression directly looking into the camera, and to accept her emotions along with Mija's poem."<sup>3</sup> Lee's film began with Agnes's corpse and ends with her reincarnation, brought back to life through the poetry of film.

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.electricsheepmagazine.co.uk/features/2011/07/27/poetry-interview-with-lee-chang-dong/>.

When Mija affirms not only life's beauty, but its ugliness, tragedy, and injustice, she is able to write the poem. Through this Lee's film enters into another register that transcends the ordinary course of historical temporality, a course that is always already aligned with a kind of cinematic realism constituted by continuity editing and Euclidean notions of time and space. Instead of obeying the spacing of time that governs the metaphysics of this tradition of realism, the final moments of *Poetry* rise to the level of modern poesis. They give us the direct images of time where past and future temporalities, the deaths of Agnes and Mija, are shown as constituted in the present. When the voice of the former overtakes that of the latter, these two women are brought together through the poetic image. Seeing the way these two women saw and hearing the grain of their voices, it seems seeing and hearing belong to no one in this final sequence. The perception of reality seems not to originate in an ego, for a mode of thinking-being is constituted here through the unfolding of the moving image. In an essay on poetic language, Heidegger reaches a culmination whereby the word itself grants the Being of the reality it ostensibly signifies. "Time times [*Die Zeit zeitigt*]," he writes, revealing how the noun "time" becomes a kind of creative action or verb through its poetics. "Time times simultaneously: the has-been, presence, and the present that is waiting for our encounter and is normally called the future. Time in its timing removes us into its threefold simultaneity, moves us thence while holding out to us the disclosure of what is in the same time, the concordant oneness of the has-been, presence, and the present waiting the encounter."<sup>4</sup> The cinema image here creates time, beyond that circumscribed by the logic of the clock. This final sequence from Lee's *Poetry* realizes a "pure optical and sound situation" that does not easily conform to the demands of narrativity and historical temporality. It utilizes sound and image to produce their own ontology – a cinema without ends, or in other words, a cinema of pure means.

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Nature of Language," *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper, 1982) 106.



Mija's voice and poem sing on behalf of Agnes, whom she did not know or meet, bringing the past into relation with the present. The series of shots blur the distinction between the two women. Such relations confound the principle of exchange-value that underpins the exchange of money for the silence of Agnes's mother, and for the life of Agnes herself. Indeed, Lee's film seems to be guided by a desire to find a mode of relation with the other that is not contingent upon mundane metaphysics. Perhaps this explains the incommensurability of poetry and the logic of settlement through money that blocked Mija's capacity to compose a poem. When her voice is overtaken by that of Agnes in the final moments of the film, the living enters into relation with the dead, not through a process of psychoanalytic identification, but by showing how the heterogeneity and singularity of one life enters into relation with another. This ethics, grounded in sound and image, is made possible through Lee's elevation of the film medium, an ennoblement of the medium that sublates the reality and trauma of Agnes's death. In his essay, "Cinema as a Democratic Emblem," Alain Badiou seems to approach this art of ennoblement when he asserts that, "At the cinema, we get to the pure from the impure."<sup>5</sup> In the other longstanding arts, one does not rise but falls from aristocratic grandeur down to the mundane and the everyday. Cinema stands at the frontier of art and non-art, of reality and that which transcends it. As Badiou writes, "It incorporates the new forms of existence, be they art or non-art, and it makes a certain selection, albeit a selection which is never complete. So that in any film, even a pure masterpiece, you can find a great number of banal images, vulgar material, stereotypes, images seen one hundred times elsewhere, things of no interest whatsoever."<sup>6</sup> Clearly, the question here is how one "rises" to art in the cinema, and it is not clear whether this ennobling has more to do with film's aesthetics or the tastes of spectator. Lee's *Poetry* shows us however that this experience of ennoblement is produced through relation – between precarious beings, between Mija and Agnes, Lee and the victims of the 2004 Miryang case, and between the film and the spectator. These

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<sup>5</sup> Alain Badiou, "On Cinema as a Democratic Emblem," *Cinema*, trans. Susan Spitzer (Cambridge: Polity, 2013) 239.

<sup>6</sup> Badiou, "On Cinema as a Democratic Emblem" 238.

relations are secured through the coordinating of lived time between each of these elements, a gesture of ennoblement that is simultaneously an ethical one.

Indeed, this elevating of reality is a particularly urgent aim for Lee and his aspirations for the future of cinema in Korea. In the press release materials for *Poetry*, he provides the following comments that express a deep melancholy for cinema's future, by linking the death of poetry to the death of cinema:

These are times when poetry is dying away. Some lament such loss and others claim, 'Poetry deserves to die.' Regardless, people continue to read and write poetry.

What does it mean then to be writing poetry when prospects of an ongoing future seem dismal? This is a question I want to pose to the public.

But in fact, it is a question I pose to myself as a filmmaker. What does it mean to be making films at times when films are dying away?

Lee is not referring to the death of commercial cinema, the popular melodramatic cinema that continues to be successfully produced and consumed in Korea and elsewhere. He is referring, as he states in a 2011 interview, to an art cinema that allows the spectator "to see the world with different eyes, to feel beauty that is not visible, to ask questions of life, to think about the meaning of my life."<sup>7</sup> Lee clearly seeks a cinema that can show viewers how life may be redeemed and how reality may be elevated in ways that do not quickly conform to the narrative and aesthetic forms endlessly reiterated by the commercial cinema.

*Poetry* realizes this cinema, one that allows the viewer "to think about the meaning of [one's] life," by telling the story of how Mija attends to the precariousness of life itself. Throughout

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<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.littlewhitelies.co.uk/features/articles/lee-chang-dong-15608>.

Lee's film, she is confronted with mortality, not only of Agnes, but also her own. And as *Poetry* unfolds, through the passing of time and as Alzheimer's slowly affects Mija's consciousness, the viewer is presented with an opportunity to think about his or her own lived life, accompanied by the life of the moving image. When Lee claims that a certain kind of cinema is dying, he seems to be referring to a cinema that enables the mortal, human viewer to live his or her life in time, irreversible, from birth to death. This stands in contrast to the repetitious production of sympathy associated with the popular melodramatic mode and with the cyclical, narrative eternal recurrence of the commercial cinema. Indeed, Lee seems ennoble the reality of the medium itself by allowing its cyclical materiality, an endlessly reproducible film reel, to express existential, lived time.

This is where this final sequence from *Poetry* coincides with the time of forgiveness. In her account of political action, Arendt describes two faculties that must be maintained lest the body politic fall into chaos. The first is the power of the promise, which stabilizes the predictability of the future and assures others of the coherence and continuity of the self through time. Such a notion of the self seems to be a necessary construct for Arendt, for it is precisely this self that is the precondition for its inclusion in the modern community. The second is forgiveness, for forgiveness interrupts the everyday course of historical reality and enables time to be experienced as duration. Beyond the deadlock induced by the cycle of sin and punishment, forgiving "is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven."<sup>8</sup> In other words, through forgiveness the one who seeks violence and the one who is to be the victim of it are both released from the logic of debt and exchange that constitute modern revenge. In this, the power of the promise and the miracle

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<sup>8</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) 241.

of forgiveness act in dialectical relation to each other, both subsuming the other in order to constantly start again in the public, political realm.

In the final shots of *Poetry*, Agnes is reborn and given new life through the power of cinema. Her appearance manifests the interruption of everyday temporality by showing that the aim of Mija's transfiguration, as her voice is overtaken by Agnes, is to renew the possibilities of living life. Such rebirth is precisely what forgiveness accomplishes. As Arendt writes in this regard:

The life span of man running toward death would invariably carry everything human to ruin and destruction if it were not for the faculty of interrupting it and beginning something new, a faculty which is inherent in action like an ever-present reminder that men, though they must die, are not born in order to die but in order to begin.<sup>9</sup>

If the cinema has the capacity to provide the sympathetic spectator with the opportunity to enable this renewal, then it must be made conditional upon its death. Poetry and cinema could be said to be always dying, each in their specific ways. Yet they require a sensitive soul, one open to the possibility of forgiveness with all its attendant impossibilities, to grant them their second chance.

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<sup>9</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition* 246.

## STANLEY CAVELL AND UKIYO-E : REDISCOVERING REALITY THROUGH THE CINEMA

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The aim of this study is to investigate the interesting relationship between Stanley Cavell's thoughts on the relationship of cinema to reality, and the Japanese art term "Ukiyo-e", which literally means "image of the floating world (Ukiyo)".

Stanley Cavell questions himself in his work *The World viewed* about what happens to reality when it is projected onto a screen. According to Cavell, unlike pure sound cinema, which is primarily visual, cannot copy reality and does not share with reality its sensory information. In this sense, cinema is deeply unreal. Its images are not even shadows, which are already marks of tridimensional objects. Its images are mere "ghosts". And still, cinema reveals to us in a "magic way" the world in its highest reality. It enables us "to contemplate the world without being viewed". Cavell shows us how cinema paradoxically enables us to rediscover reality by its estrangement from reality.

On this point we can distinguish a parallelism with the Japanese notion Ukiyo-e, which has come to mainly designate Japanese stamps. Its original sense of image of the floating world is very revealing since it has this double, paradoxical meaning of unreality and at the same time of the possibility of seeing "life as it happens in front of our eyes" as it was described by Hayashi at the Universal Exposition in 1878. It is the intention of this study to explore the richness of the meaning of this notion, from its Buddhist origins to its new meaning in Asai Ryoi's work "The tale of the floating world".

The final objective is to better understand, with the help of this notion that is apparently so removed from the world of the cinema and from western culture, in which cinema first appeared, Cavell's idea of rediscovering reality through cinema.

The aim of this work is to investigate what appears to me as an intriguing link between Stanley Cavell's views on the relationship of cinema to reality and the Japanese art term *Ukiyo-e*, which designates Japanese stamps, well known in the Western World since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At first glance, they appear totally unrelated: not only different from a cultural point of view, but as being fundamentally different areas. Indeed in the first case we are dealing with a philosophical thought, in the second case we have nothing more than a mere art genre, which is not even cinema. However, I believe that these differences can be surpassed for two reasons: firstly, Stanley Cavell has always been open to unexpected relations between remote areas and cultures, stating in his lecture "The Fantastic of Philosophy" that "the task of cultural perspective

is not only privately useful but philosophically creative”.<sup>1</sup> Secondly *Ukiyo-e* is more than a mere art term. It has a deeper meaning that involves a specific view of the world and attitude towards the world.

Even if a relation between Stanley Cavell’s thoughts on the relationship of cinema to reality and the art term *Ukiyo-e* doesn’t seem impossible, why should we be interested in it? As I will show, they share a common paradox, which straddles between unreality and reality, or to put it more properly, between unreality and a new way of looking to reality. This is why the term of *Ukiyo-e* allows us to consider from a new perspective Stanley Cavell’s idea of rediscovering reality through cinema. However, before drawing this parallelism, I’ll first start dealing with Cavell’s paradoxical idea on cinema and reality as it is exposed in his first great work on cinema, published in 1971, *The World Viewed, Reflections on the Ontology of Film*.

First let us remark that the title of Cavell’s work doesn’t mention reality, and accordingly its relation to cinema, but it puts forward the notion of world. So we can guess already that it’s the notion of world which is at stake in Cavell’s thinking on cinema and reality, and this point is very important for the further development of my lecture, since the notion *Ukiyo-e* is also intrinsically bound with the concept of world. However Cavell starts his analysis of cinema and what it actually is in terms of reality. Thus in the second chapter of *The World Viewed* he starts to think about “what happens to reality when it is projected and screened”.<sup>2</sup> This question has to be put in the context of his critical assessment of Panofsky and Bazin’s definition of cinema. Indeed, according to Cavell, cinema cannot be a mere “dramaturgy of nature” unlike Bazin and its medium is not “physical reality as such” as for Panofsky.<sup>3</sup> As Cavell would have it, Bazin’s

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Cavell, “The Fantastic of Philosophy” in *In Quest of the Ordinary* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988) 181.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed, Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971) 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem.*

and Panofsky's definition of cinema is problematic. This problematic character lies in the fact that the medium of films is photographic. It shares thus with photography its nature of being an image. Compared with sound, which can be reproduced in a recording, the image, even when it is a photograph, cannot reproduce a sight. Cavell describes this issue as follows : "The problem is not that photographs are not visual copies of objects, or that objects can't be visually copied. The problem is that even if a photograph were a copy of an object, so to speak, it would not bear the relation to its object that a recording bears to the sound it copies."<sup>4</sup> So the mystery and the problem emerge when one considers the relation of photography to its object, because it does not reproduce its sound but its sight. Now the objects don't "make sights" and "don't have sights".<sup>5</sup> So, unlike the sound, one cannot dissociate the sight from the object that is seen. That is the reason why photography, unlike the audio recording, has an intimate relationship to the real object, and thus to reality. In a certain sense it carries the real object, and at the same time it confronts us with the absence of this object.

Since the medium of cinema is photographic, here lies also the reason why a film is called a motion picture: cinema is marked by the same mysterious relationship to reality as photography. Cavell express this problematic character in a radical way, by stating that film has less a direct relation to reality than shadows, while at least shadows are direct traces of real objects. Projected images are not even shadows, they are "shades".<sup>6</sup> How can then those shades "convince us of the world's reality" as Cavell states this in the 14<sup>th</sup> Chapter of *The World Viewed*?<sup>7</sup> And what does it mean to be convinced of the world's reality? Reading Cavell further gives us the

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<sup>4</sup> *Idem* 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Idem* 20.

<sup>6</sup> *Idem* 233. This is a note to ch. 2: "Shadows are two-dimensional, but they are cast by three-dimensional objects – tracings of opacity, not graduations of it. This suggests that phenomenologically the idea of two-dimensionality is an idea of either transparency or outline. Projected images are not shadows; rather, one might say, they are shades." Thus, the fact that Cavell designates projected images as mere shades is in accordance with his idea that two-dimensionality is not an appropriate characteristic of motion picture.

<sup>7</sup> *Idem* 102.

beginning of an answer : Movies convince us of the world's reality by taking *views* of it. So it seems like movies through their estrangement from reality allows us in a paradoxical way to *view* the world, to confront ourselves to its reality, as if our original visual contact with the world would not be enough to fully grasp world's reality and we would need a second, artificial view to rediscover the world.<sup>8</sup>

In order to understand how cinema allows us to view the world, let us first consider the way Cavell analyzes concretely what actually happens when we see a movie. He starts his analysis with photography, which he then applies to cinema. Two features of photography, which one can also find in movies, connect us with the world. First, photography, unlike painting, does not bear the mark of the composition and arrangement of one human being. This is why Cavell asserts that “photography maintains the presentness of the world by accepting our absence from it”.<sup>9</sup> To that I would add: it is precisely because photography puts aside human being presence that the world as such is showed to us, in its most confronting reality, through photography. Applying this feature to the cinema, Cavell is putting forward the “helplessness”<sup>10</sup> of the viewer, because the viewer is viewing through cinema something that he cannot master, since he cannot act but only look at. He accomplishes a pure viewing, which he cannot accomplish in real life, since he is caught in his possibilities and necessities of acting. That is why Cavell asserts in Chapter 16 of *The World Viewed* that “film takes our very distance and powerlessness over the world as the condition of the world's natural appearance. It promises the exhibition of the world in itself.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Rediscovering the world requires a new view of the world, because according to Stanley Cavell the view constitutes our original contact with the world, as he states in a fragment of *The World Viewed*: “To say that we wish to view the world itself is to say that we are wishing for the condition of viewing as such. *That is our way of establishing our connection with the world: through viewing it, or having views of it.*” (the italics are mine)

<sup>9</sup> *Idem* 23.

<sup>10</sup> *Idem* 26.

<sup>11</sup> *Idem* 119.



The second feature of photography which Cavell applies to cinema as well, lies in the fact that photography shows us the world as a whole, even though what it immediately shows to us is only a tiny part of the world. However, as Cavell puts it “you can always ask, pointing to an object in a photograph – a building say- what lies behind it, totally obscured by it.”<sup>12</sup> This kind of questioning is specific for photography and would not make sense in most of the cases for a painting. “A painting *is* a world; a photograph is *of* the world.”<sup>13</sup> because it implies much more than it shows, something that lies far behind the borders of its frame and which allows us to question what we see in a photography.<sup>14</sup> Just in the same way, that what a movie shows us lies far beyond the frame of its screen. What a movie shows us immediately is limited by its means to shows us the world, which is the camera, but it is not limited by what the movies shows us as such. Cavell designates this kind of frame which always refers to something that is beyond itself with a curious expression: he calls it “phenomenological frame”, probably as being opposed to a pure physical frame. As Cavell states it in the third chapter of *the World Viewed* this phenomenological frame is “indefinitely extendible and contractible, limited in the smallness of the object it can grasp only by the state of its technology, and in largeness only by the span of the world.”<sup>15</sup> That means that the frame of a movie implies an infinite world, which can be explored in an infinite number of ways by the camera. Thus cinema allows us not only to view the world but to view it in its infinity, yet simultaneously estranging us from the real world in which we are acting and “displacing us from our natural habitation in the world” following Cavell’s words.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Idem* 23.

<sup>13</sup> *Idem* 24.

<sup>14</sup> Photography has a paradoxical relation to the world, since it implies the rest of world as its necessary background and at the same time it rejects the rest of the world as being excluded from the photography. Cavell puts this point as follows: “The implied presence of the rest of the world and its explicit rejection, are as essential in the experience of a photograph as what it explicitly presents.” (*Idem* 24). This paradoxical relation is marked by a tension between what photography shows us *explicitly* and what it shows us *implicitly*.

<sup>15</sup> *Idem* 25.

<sup>16</sup> *Idem* 41.

That is why one can say that cinema links unreality with a rediscovery of reality, as we would be too close to reality to view it properly and would need first to be estranged from it. It is precisely this link between unreality and reality that I propose to reconsider from a new perspective, which is the *Ukiyo-e*.

Interestingly enough, the notion of *Ukiyo-e* has not been much explored from a philosophical point of view, nor in Japan and nor in the Western World.<sup>17</sup> However, the literal meaning of *Ukiyo-e* shows already an intriguing affinity with Cavell's views on cinema and its relationship to the world. It means indeed image (*e*, 絵) of the floating world (*ukiyo*, 浮世). Thus we have three elements: the image, which reminds us of the photography as medium of the cinema, floating, which reminds us of the projected images as mere shades and finally world, which is the main thread of Cavell's thought on cinema. Of course, *Ukiyo-e* remains in a certain sense a kind of painting, even if it is a stamp, and allows thus its mechanical reproduction. Thus a stamp cannot be identified to photography. However, what is for our purpose most interesting is this expression of *Ukiyo*, floating world. It has undeniable Buddhist connotations, which connects to the spiritual history of Japan, much before the apparition of the Japanese stamps in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed Buddhist spirituality, which cannot be reduced to one school or thought system, but which however present some general tendencies regarding life attitude, emphasizes the ephemeral character of the world implying thus the necessity of a detachment from the world. This ephemeral character of the world resonates in the expression of floating world, since that

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<sup>17</sup> The concept of *Ukiyo* (floating world) has already been used by the Japanese philosopher Shuzo Kuki, for example in his work *The Structure of Iki* (1930). However it is not a central concept of this work and it is used only to explain what he considers to be a traditional Japanese life attitude and mode of being, which is the *Iki*. Moreover, Kuki does not explore in this work the richness of the meaning of *Ukiyo*, reducing it to the meaning of a world of vicissitudes and suffering, where "what we wish is not easily realized" and thus offers to us a resigned attitude towards life. Thus he gives to this concept of *Ukiyo* a merely negative meaning, since it implies a detachment from the worldly concerns, embodying an essential characteristic of the *Iki* which is the *Akirame*, meaning resignation, acception. (cf. Shuzō Kuki, *The Structure of the Iki (Iki no kōzō)* in *The Structure of Detachment. The Aesthetic Vision of Kuki Shuzō* (Hiroshi Nara, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 2004) 21). My purpose is instead to bring to the fore the positive meaning of this concept, as possibility of rediscovering the world. It is also my purpose to bring this concept outside the borders of the traditional Japanese culture, by bringing it into dialogue with the thought of a Western philosopher, which is Stanley Cavell, whereas the purpose of Kuki is to unveil through his work a mode of being which is "localized in Japanese ethnicity". (cf. *Idem* 4)

which is floating seems to be ephemeral. Notwithstanding this semantic affinity, one should not link too easily the concept of *Ukiyo* to Buddhism, since Japanese Buddhist thought used to use another concept, pronounced in the same way, i.e. as *Ukiyo*, but written with a different character: the character *Uki* (憂) does not mean “floating” but “suffering”. Thus, world of suffering and floating world are two different concepts, even if they present some affinities.

The concept of *Ukiyo* as floating world appears for the first time in the Japanese writings in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Its apparition is parallel with the apparition of a new type of society, through the apparition of the middle class, in the city of Edo, now known as Tokyo. This new social layer promoted a new life attitude, valuing daily life and its daily pleasures. This new attitude is reflected in Japanese stamps which, at the difference of Zen Buddhist paintings, are depicting scenes of daily life, and moreover in plenty of different sparkling colours.<sup>18</sup> The notion of *Ukiyo* appears for the first time in the work of Asai Ryoi, called *Ukiyo Monogatari, Tales of the floating world*, written around 1665. In this work we can find this definition: "... living only for the moment, savouring the moon, the snow, the cherry blossoms, and the maple leaves, singing songs, drinking sake, and diverting oneself just in floating, unconcerned by the prospect of imminent poverty, buoyant and carefree, like a gourd carried along with the river current: this is what we call *Ukiyo*."<sup>19</sup> We thus see that *Ukiyo* does not designate here an ontological characteristic of the world, but an attitude towards it, which implies that we should live fully every moment without caring for the future. So from this point of view the notion of *Ukiyo* exhorts

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<sup>18</sup> One must say that from a historical point of view the beginning of this new, profoundly wordly society was also the beginning of Japan's isolation from the rest of the world. This lasted no less than two centuries during what is called the Edo Period (1603-1868). It is for this reason that Japanese stamps were discovered in Europe only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>19</sup> Money L. Hickman, "Views of the Floating World," *MFA Bulletin* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), 1976, 76: 10. The notion of *Ukiyo-e* as image of the floating world appears for the first time in the foreword written by Ankei for a book with stamps of the artist Hishikawa Moronobu, called *Images of Japanese warriors (Yamato musha-e)*, published around 1680. The artists that are the founders of the school of *Ukiyo-e* are called painters of the floating world (*Ukiyo Eshi*). (cf. Gisèle Lambert, "L'apparition de l'*Ukiyo-e* à l'époque d'Edo" (The apparition of *Ukiyo-e* during the Edo period) in *Estampes japonaises, Images d'un monde éphémère*, sous la dir. De Gisèle Lambert & Jocelyn Bouquillard (BnF, Fundació Caixa Catalunya: Barcelona, 2008) 17)

us to change our way of seeing reality and the world. We can even say, in a certain sense, that it invites us to see the world by putting aside our expectations and anticipations of the future, which turn away our view from the world as it is now in the present moment, in its highest reality. Just as the cinema, *Ukiyo* allows us to rediscover the world.

This understanding finds its echo in the definition of *Ukiyo-e* which was given by the art merchant Hayashi in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Upon being asked by Edmond de Goncourt, who was one of the first Western scholars to have attempted to reconstruct the history of Japanese stamps,<sup>20</sup> what *Ukiyo-e* actually means, Tadamasa Hayashi answered: “your French translation of *Ukiyo-e* as school of the living world or of the life as it happens before our eyes expresses exactly its meaning.”<sup>21</sup> It is already clear from this answer that *Ukiyo-e* means much more than an art genre, and surely not a plain image, say painting. It is a school that helps us to rediscover the world as a living world, that is as the present real world. The notion of *Ukiyo-e* implies a new view. And the metaphor of the eyes used by Hayashi shows this clearly: as he says, “*Ukiyo-e* is the school of the life as it happens before our eyes.” Shall we then say that *Ukiyo-e* learns us to see life as a movie, and learns us to become as a cinema viewer?

However the affinity between *Ukiyo-e* and Stanley Cavell’s view on cinema goes further. Let us consider indeed this notion of floating which is contained in the word *Ukiyo* and which is mentioned by Asai Ryoi when he exhorts us to become like floating beings. What does this floating actually mean? I think it is very difficult to grasp this notion because it is on the threshold of being and unbeing, of reality and unreality. It implies that somehow *Ukiyo-e* is intrinsically bound with unreality, just like cinema, it allows us to rediscover reality through an unreal dimension. What does this unreal dimension actually mean? Is it bound with the Buddhist

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<sup>20</sup> cf. *Estampes japonaises, Images d’un monde éphémère*, 17.

<sup>21</sup> Brigitte Richard-Koyama, *Japon rêvé, Edmond de Goncourt et Hayashi Tadamasa* (Hermann: Savoir sur l’Art, 2002) 121-122.

connotations of this notion? In order to answer this question more research should be done around this concept.

I would however venture already a hypothesis: perhaps the unreal dimension of *Ukiyo-e* is bound with the fantastic as it is understood by Cavell for example in his lecture *The Fantastic of Philosophy*, since the fantastic is opposed to reality. In this lecture, which is posterior to the *World viewed* and shares new views on cinema, Cavell argues that cinema allows us to see the fantastic of reality in its most plain ordinariness, because cinema has as Cavell writes “the perfect power to juxtapose fantasy and reality, to show their lacing as precisely not special.”<sup>22</sup> That is why perhaps Japanese stamps which are supposed to show us “life as it happens before our eyes” exhibits sometimes the most extravagant fantasy scenes, as this would be paradoxically an ultimate possibility of viewing the world in its highest reality.<sup>23</sup> This is also why, not incidentally, Cavell takes as a perfect example of this fantastic power of cinema a Japanese movie, which is Mizoguchi’s famous movie *Ugetsui*. He writes about it as following: “It is as great an image of the uncanny as I know on film.” Let us read his beautiful analysis of the end scene of this movie: “To these I added Mizoguchi’s *Ugetsui*, whose closing image is of a husband returned from a marvelous journey of the erotic to find his poor old house as he had left it, but empty. He lies down on the floor, curled like a child, and in the grey light his wife circles the room. We ache with the man for her to be real, for the beautifully familiar to succeed, or resucceed, the beautiful unfamiliar; but the stern, intermittent tap of a wood block wedges itself between time and eternity, and she vanishes.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Stanley Cavell, “The Fantastic of Philosophy,” *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 188.

<sup>23</sup> Thus the Japanese artist Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797/1798 - 1861) made many stamps depicting fantastic scenes, such as legendary figures fighting with monsters, oracles, divinities. For example in his painting “Kintoki Swims up the Waterfall” he depicts the legendary folklore hero Kintoki, also named Kintaro (Golden Boy). Having superhuman strength, he carries in his arms a huge fish, floating on the waves of the sea.

<sup>24</sup> *Idem.*

How is the possibility of the fantastic bound with the possibility of rediscovering reality realized through the cinema? This question still remains open. Let me conclude however by bringing to your attention one of the features of this question which could perhaps be considered fantastic. Indeed I cannot help but have an uncanny feeling when I'm talking about Stanley Cavell's relationship to a concept from a cultural world that still remains far away from Western world. Indeed, it gives me the feeling of rediscovering in a new way Japan, here in Lisbon, after Portuguese sailors discovered five centuries ago as the first Europeans Japan.

## PINA 3D AND THE SENSIBLE POWER OF MOVIES<sup>1</sup>

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This paper examines the sensible power of movie images based on an analysis of *Pina 3D* (2011), Wim Wenders' documentary feature on choreographer Pina Bausch. At first I suggest that the question about the ontological status of images in films is a central issue of Wender's work that goes back to his 1982 Golden Palm in the Cannes Film Festival with *The State of Things*. From this initial statement, I argue that movie images defy traditional philosophical discussions of representation, such as were common in the early Modern period: on the one hand, they are arbitrarily created, like those produced by our imagination; on the other hand, they resemble the more powerful, involuntary sensory data that we ordinarily regard as copies of things that exist in the world outside our minds. Finally, I propose that the use of 3D technology in Pina may be understood as an attack on the representational paradigm in cinema, since it points out to the assertion that movies retain their aesthetic force not from the fact that they may be taken as copies of "real" things, but rather from the sensible power of the images themselves.

*The State of Things*, winner of the 1982 Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival, contains perhaps one of the most famous lines from all Wim Wenders' pictures. The plot places a movie crew on location in a seaside hotel outside Lisbon waiting hopelessly for money to finish a version of Roger Corman's *The Day the World Ended*. Joe, the cameraman played by filmmaker Samuel Fuller, tells us that "life is in color, but black and white is more realistic".

Back in the 1980's, it was common to take this statement as a polemic attack on the entertainment industry and its predilection for color. Later in *The State of Things*, director Friedrich travels to Los Angeles in search of the producers only to find out that they are mob dealers who lost every interest in his picture upon the discovery that it was being shot in black and white. Wenders' movie ends up in an actual shooting where Friedrich points out his camera, emblematically, like a gun.

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<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful for the critical remarks on this paper made by Joe Kickasola, Patrick Pessoa and Márcia Gonçalves when it was presented at the International Lisbon Conference on Philosophy and Film and at the VII Encontro Nacional do GT de Estética da ANPOF.

If we understand Joe's statement in this way, it is difficult to avoid the feeling that it lost most of its original force; worst case scenario, we might even assume intellectual dishonesty. In the last thirty years, Wenders has filmed repeatedly in color, sometimes backed up by million dollar budgets and Hollywood actors such as Andie McDowell, Mel Gibson or Mila Jovovich. What I propose to do here is to discuss the possibility that this line from *The State of Things* does in fact point out to a central concern of Wenders' filmmaking, something which has resurfaced lately in his documentary feature about German choreographer Pina Bausch.

But before we can deal with *Pina* (2011), it is necessary to understand in what sense we may consider this line polemic. I will allow myself to draw from the categories of Modern philosophy here, which are more familiar to me. The intuitive strangeness of Joe's sentence lies in the fact that the model we use to interpret movie images is that of our mental images, which are in color. Since we usually suppose that they are also truthful representations or copies of the real, the suggestion that "black and white is more realistic" sounds like a contradiction.

When *The States of Things* received the Golden Lion, such suggestion could be taken as part of a political agenda against a representational conception of art, particularly dominant in film industry. In movies, I daresay, this state of things hasn't changed much since then. Traditional narrative forms are still an essential part of our experience of watching them; we still keep asking ourselves what the images objectively denote – or, at least, what their sequence "means", what the director wishes to "communicate".

What is it, then, that attaches movies so firmly to their representational features, in spite of all the attacks launched at them in *The State of Things* and in so many other works by so many film iconoclasts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? The analogy with mental images suggests a way to answer this question. And I intend, in fact, to address the problem taking into account remarks from philosophers of the early Modern era – a period which felt, perhaps more acutely than any other, the need to develop extensively analyses of such representations.



Many authors of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries maintain that there are at least two types of mental entities, different from each other by the intensity with which they manifest themselves in us and by their origin. In the third of his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes sets out to classify our ideas as a necessary step to his final goal, the rational proof of God's existence. According to him, "if I am now hearing a noise, seeing the sun, feeling the heat of a fire, up to now I have judged that such sensations derive from things existing outside myself".<sup>2</sup> A fundamental difference between these two types of mental entities is that ideas of the first kind "do not depend on my own will, and therefore do not depend on myself. For they often intrude upon me against my will. Now, for instance, I am feeling heat, whether I want to or not (...)"<sup>3</sup> Berkeley establishes a similar distinction in his *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* without ever mentioning exterior objects:

I find I can excite ideas in my mind at pleasure, and vary and shift the scene as oft as I think fit. (...) But, whatever power I may have over my own thoughts, I find the ideas actually perceived by Sense have not a like dependence on my will. (...) The ideas of Sense are more strong, lively, and distinct than those of the imagination; they have likewise a steadiness, order, and coherence, and are not excited at random, as those which are the effects of human wills often are, but in a regular train or series (...).<sup>4</sup>

David Hume probably left us the most systematic approach to this problem. According to his *Treatise on Human Understanding*, all our mental entities – our perceptions – can be divided into two types, ideas and impressions; the difference between them "consists in the degrees of force and liveliness, with which they strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought

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<sup>2</sup> René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Michael Moriarty (Oxford: Oxford University, 2008) 27.

<sup>3</sup> Descartes, *Meditations* 27.

<sup>4</sup> George Berkeley, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Desmond M. Clarke (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2008) 94.

or consciousness”.<sup>5</sup> Ideas are copies of sensible impressions which precede them and, as such, “faint images of these in thinking and reasoning”.<sup>6</sup> They may be arbitrarily produced by imagination or memory, whilst impressions are simply given to us spontaneously, from unknown origins.

The invention of photography – and of cinema, by derivation – has made these analyses significantly more complex. In Humean terms, photographic images bear more liveliness than any ideas, almost achieving the degree of intensity which is characteristic of impressions. Nevertheless, we are also conscious that, like ideas, they are artificial representations produced by us.

This heightened liveliness, that I propose to call here its sensible power, is what seems to force upon us an immediate association between movie images and our impressions. It is a fundamental feature of this type of representation that it represents, and that it does so in a way that is similar to the way we suppose our mental entities to represent. This feature has not been overlooked by the film industry. In fact, its history shows the increasing employment of technological advancements to make movie images even livelier and more similar to its mental counterparts by the introduction of sound, color and, more recently, an extended sense of depth with the expansion of stereoscopic projection. One might also count amongst such techniques the attempts to emulate the sense of smell in devices such as Smell-O-Vision or Odorama.

What I aim to suggest with these remarks is that the movie image is intrinsically bound to a certain realism: what it presents to us is that which makes out our ordinary experience of the world. From a very different point of view, this idea is one the key tenets of Stanley Cavell’s seminal work on film ontology, *The World Viewed* (1971). As he indicates in the “More of *The*

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<sup>5</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007) 7.

<sup>6</sup> Hume, *Treatise* 7.

*World Viewed*”, an essay published in 1979 which appraises some difficult points of his book, “(...) film bears a relation to reality unprecedented in the other arts”.<sup>7</sup>

In *The World Viewed*, the nature of such relation is determined by a formula according to which the physical or material basis of a movie is constituted by “successions of world projections”.<sup>8</sup> I cannot explore in detail here what, exactly, Cavell takes to be projected on the screen. It is enough to mention that his analyses draw on the celebrated essay by Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life”, to depict three recurring myths in the experience of classic Hollywood movies: the dandy, the woman and the military man.<sup>9</sup> Cavell further argues that the development of “modernist” films in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marks the decadence of this mythical dimension, the loss of the “conviction in the movies’ originating myths and geniuses – in the public world of men, the private company of woman, the secret isolation of the dandy (...)”.<sup>10</sup> Historians of philosophy would probably be tempted to describe this as the estrangement of man from the contemporary world.<sup>11</sup>

More than what is projected on the screen, I wish to draw attention to the way in which projection occurs in movies: *automatically*. As Cavell himself recognizes, the notion of automatism has various meanings in *The World Viewed*. It denotes, for instance, the ways by which we may produce objects pertaining to a certain artistic tradition.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, I believe these different aspects of the concept are bound to a fundamental observation about photography

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<sup>7</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (Harvard: Harvard University, 1979) 166.

<sup>8</sup> Cavell, *World* 105.

<sup>9</sup> “These, as Baudelaire describes them, are not merely further items in cinema’s daily sustenance; they have been movies’ presiding geniuses” (Cavell, *World* 47). Cavell discusses the contents of these myths in chapters 8 and 9 of his book.

<sup>10</sup> Cavell, *World* 62.

<sup>11</sup> As Cavell indicates (*World* 60), when they enter “modernism” films “no longer naturally establish conviction in our presentness to the world”.

<sup>12</sup> Cavell, *World* 104-5.

and its use in movies: we remain absent both from the production of images and from their projection on the screen. According to Cavell, “‘automatic’ emphasizes the mechanical fact of photography, in particular, the absence of the human hand in forming these objects and the absence of its creatures in their screening”.<sup>13</sup> Unlike a painting, the photographic image is produced mechanically, by a device; unlike a theater play, its experience is both the experience of a reality and the experience of our absence from the reality which is the object of such experience.

The fact that the experience of movies is an experience of reality is a consequence of photography itself. As Cavell indicates, a photographic image does not copy and is not similar to that of which it is supposed to be a representation, but rather *presents* it to us. When we look at the image, there are a few questions we can always pose which have only circumstantial meaning, for example, for a painting: What is adjacent to that which we have before us? What was left behind when the world was cut to fit this particular object of presentation? One could say, following Cavell: “a painting *is* a world; a photograph is *of* the world”.<sup>14</sup>

The realism that Cavell assigns to the photographic image is ultimately what I have tried to define with the Humean notion of liveliness. But what is, exactly, the reality which photography and cinema present to us?

To answer this question, I will go back to the analogy with mental entities and try to pose it in terms of Modern philosophy: is the liveliness of impressions enough to ensure us of the “reality” of a representation, if we take this word to mean that it corresponds to something other than the mental image itself? In his *Meditations*, Descartes denies this, claiming that

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<sup>13</sup> Cavell, *World* 73. This formula is taken from chapter 11, but it summarizes discussions which take place in chapters 2 and 3 of *The World Viewed*.

<sup>14</sup> Cavell, *World* 24.

although these ideas do not depend on my own will, it does not necessarily follow that they derive from things existing outside me. For (...) perhaps there is some other faculty within me, as yet insufficiently known to me, that produces such ideas – just as up to now it has always seemed to me that they form themselves in me while I am asleep without any assistance from external things.<sup>15</sup>

Berkeley raises numerous arguments against the very possibility of assuming that our mental images are copies of external objects and concludes that what we call reality is defined merely by the two features that distinguish the ideas of sense from those of imagination: their higher liveliness and the fact that they are not actively produced by us.<sup>16</sup>

What we may learn from Descartes and Berkeley is that the reality of films, like the reality of mental images, cannot be defined in representational but, maybe, in presentational terms. What makes movie images real is their sensible power and liveliness. In this sense, Joe's statement in *The State of Things* is not so surprising or polemic: black and white may be as lively as color.

I believe that Wenders' concern with the ontological status of movie images has been recently confirmed in *Pina*, which he described in many interviews as a project coauthored with choreographer Pina Bausch. The most significant aspect for the experience of this film is its use

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<sup>15</sup> Descartes, *Meditations* 28.

<sup>16</sup> Berkeley's contention in the *Principles* is that there is no material substance. The philosopher raises several arguments against the notion of external matter in §§1-23 of his work, and then proceeds to defend his position against possible counterarguments in §§34-84. The first of these consists, precisely, in the assumption that immaterialism implies the destruction of reality, since ideas are only in the mind and, hence, are not "real". Berkeley answers this objection in the following way: "I do not argue against the existence of any one thing that we can apprehend, either by sense or reflection. That the things I see with mine eyes and touch with my hands do exist, really exist, I make not the least question. The only thing whose existence we deny is that which philosophers call matter or corporeal substance. (...) There are spiritual substances, minds, or human souls, which will or excite ideas in themselves at pleasure; but these are faint, weak, and unsteady in respect of others they perceive by sense, which being impressed upon them according to certain rules or laws of nature, speak themselves the effects of a mind more powerful and wise than human spirits. These latter are said to have more reality in them than the former: by which is meant that they are more affecting, orderly, and distinct, and that they are not fictions of the mind perceiving them. And in this sense, the sun that I see by day is the real sun, and that which I imagine by night is the idea of the former. In the sense here given of 'reality', it is evident that every vegetable, star, mineral, and in general each part of the mundane system, is as much a real being by our principles as by any other" (Berkeley, *Writings* 96).

of 3D technology – so significant that it completely loses its meaning in the absence of this element. As I indicated earlier, the development of stereoscopic projection aimed at making photographic images more “real” by emulating the experience of depth of the human eye. But the fact remains that we actually do not see as the 3D camera sees. If our mental images do look more profound than their counterparts in traditional film, they do not detach objects in the foreground while leaving other present and in focus in the background; they also do not make us constantly perceive objects that seem to be jumping towards us.

The point I wish to make is that 3D movies are more real than our impressions, in the sense by which Berkeley designates what reality is. It is not casual that the film industry usually employs this technique in pictures with fantastic argument, such as *thrillers* or science fiction, where the over reality is masked by the very nature of the plot. On the other hand, Wenders’ choice of using 3D in a documentary feature about a much more commonplace subject – the workings of a contemporary dance company – draws our attention precisely to their excesses in liveliness. We are constantly reminded that these images are very different from the mental representations that they were supposed to reproduce.

Moreover, 3D images need to choose which elements will come to the foreground and which will remain in the background in order to produce their typical effect. It is not accidental that we are frightened by the possibility of getting wet when we watch Bausch’s *Vollmond* in Wenders’ movie. This is the result of a carefully planned decision, just like the bloody knife that rips through the screen in less noble instances of this genre.

In this sense, it is a mistake to assume that *Pina* conveys an experience close to that which one could have watching Bausch’s work live. There is no point in any theater where one could see what the film shows us. The red dress in *The Rite of Spring* was never red as it is red in Wenders’ movie. Had the opportunity of watching it, Bausch herself would be forced to recognize that she was looking at something she had never seen before. What is given to our perception is

not the reality of her dance, but rather the reality that Wenders creates with it. He is entirely correct when he says he coauthored this work.

There seems to be, then, a relation between Wenders' concerns in 1982 and 2011. The question that Joe and Bausch are trying to voice is about the reality of movie images. I believe that we may answer it by stating that the real in cinema is produced by the sensible power of images themselves, and not from the fact that they represent external objects: in *The State of Things*, because representations should then appear less real, in *Pina*, because they do appear more real than the reality of our mental images.

There remains one question which this paper does not fully address and which I can only mention in passing at this point. What exactly conveys to film images the liveliness that makes them real? One would be tempted to suggest that in some measure the sense data itself should make them similar to our mental images when they are presented to us. And I think this is partially correct: for instance, the fact that film images are moving images seems to be a necessary condition for seeing them as analogous to our ordinary experience of the world.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, sense data alone cannot entirely explain the reality of movies, because the lack of it does not always make a film less real. Another element seems to play an important role here, one to which I have so far only briefly alluded. It is related to the fact that, although photography is similar to mental entities in their degree of liveliness, it is also a type of representation that is arbitrarily created by man. In our experience of the world, we may look around and check what is adjacent to that which comes before us; in our experience of photographic reality, we can only experience what is presented to us as reality.

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<sup>17</sup> Cavell attaches great significance to the development of moving images in making films capable of presenting reality. As he suggests, "setting pictures to motion mechanically overcame what I earlier called the inherent theatricality of the (still) photograph. (...) Film takes our very distance and powerlessness over the world as the condition of the world's natural appearance. This is its promise of candor: that what it reveals is entirely what is revealed to it, that nothing revealed by the world in its presence is lost" (Cavell, *World* 119).

The point I wish to make is that movie experience is bound to the perception that the reality which is presented to us is an arbitrarily created reality. It is irrelevant whether we assume it to be the result of the filmmaker's genius or rather of the lack thereof in the mass products of the entertainment industry. But it is not irrelevant that we can always ask, when we experience the reality of movies, why it was created this way, and not that other.

This is possibly one of the directions in which my comprehension of the nature of photography is at odds with the one we find in *The World Viewed*. Cavell's insistence on the automatic production of photographic images seems to underplay the role of the producer who looks and decides what should be looked at, who cuts the world and presents it cut to us – as if recognizing that these images are arbitrarily produced would necessarily imply unrealism in cinema.<sup>18</sup> I have tried to show, nevertheless, that images obtain their reality from their sensible power, whether they are mental entities or representations produced by man. In my opinion, it is this strange paradox that most deeply qualifies our experience of movies: the arbitrary

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<sup>18</sup> In his most famous work on this subject (*Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, trans. Anthony Matthews (London: Reaktion, 2000), Vilém Flusser vehemently criticizes any attempt to define photography by its mechanical automatism that underplays the role of the photographer in the production of photographic imagery. "For people who look at photographs naively", he maintains, they signify "states of things that have been reflected onto surfaces. For these people, photographs represent the world itself. Admittedly, such naïve observers will concede that the states of things are reflected onto surfaces from specific points of view but they won't worry too much about that. Any philosophy of photography will therefore seem to them a complete waste of mental energy" (41). But the elements of a photographic image are not, for Flusser, mere impressions of the world, but rather "transcoded concepts that claim to have been reflected automatically from the world onto the surface. It is precisely this deception that has to be decoded so as to identify the true significance of the photograph, i.e. programmed concepts (...)" (44, my emphasis). Moreover, the process that leads to the transcoding of such concepts involves both the apparatus and the photographer – or, according to his formula, the "photographer/camera complex" (45) – in a relation that is frequently described as a combination of co-operation and conflict: "A comparison of the photographer's intention and the intention of the camera shows that there are points where both converge and others where they diverge. At the points of convergence they work together; at the points of divergence they conflict with one another. Every single photograph is the result, at one and the same time, of co-operation and of conflict between camera and photographer" (46). To understand what a picture means, we have to ask, then: "How far have photographers succeeded in subordinating the camera's program to their own intentions, and by what means?" And, vice versa: "How far has the camera succeeded in redirecting photographers' intentions back to the interests of the camera's program, and by what means?" On the basis of these criteria, the 'best' photographs are those in which photographers win out against the camera's program in the sense of their human intentions, i.e. they subordinate the camera to human intention" (47).



presentation of reality. In this sense, movies may be the closest to what Kant expected from beauty in the arts: to look like nature and continue to be art.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> “Art can only be called beautiful when we are conscious that it is art and, nevertheless, it seems to us nature”. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976) 241. My translation.